The Frontier Scouts

Charles Chenevix Trench

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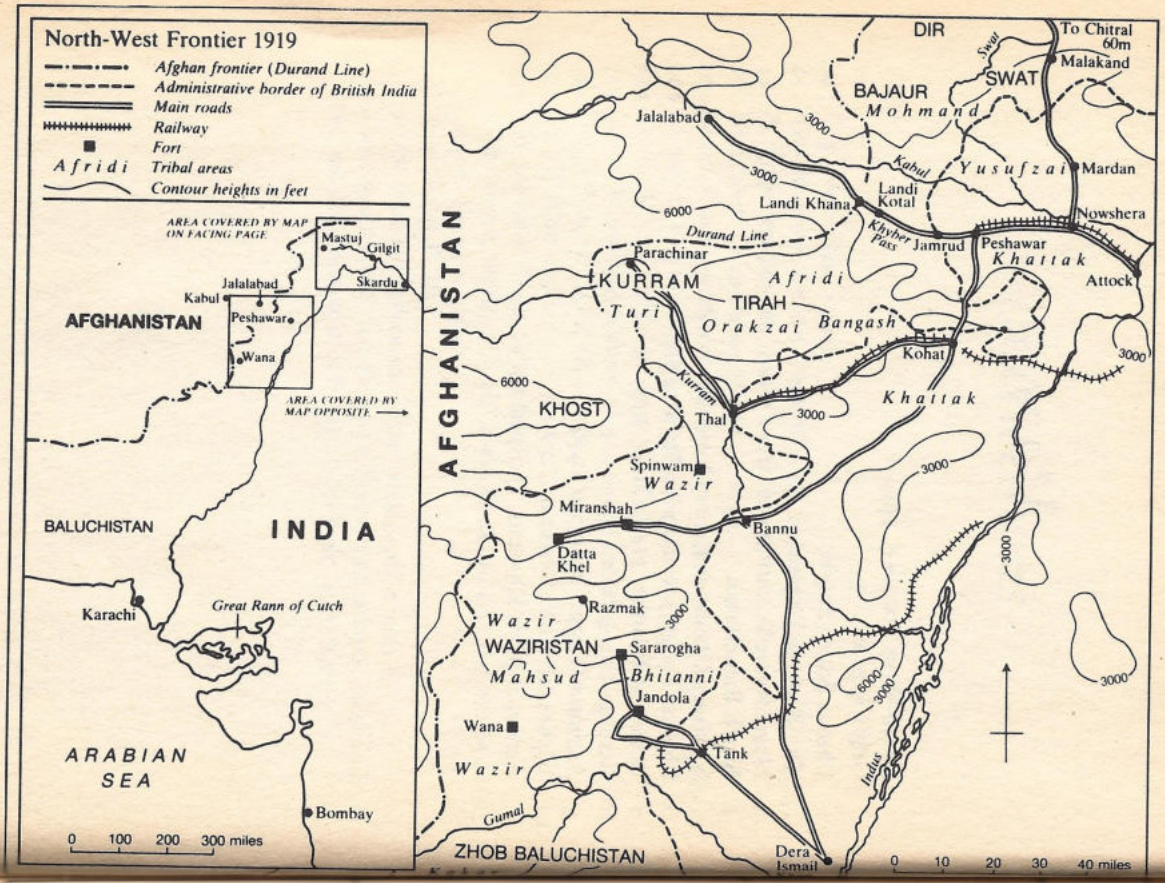
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Main roads
Railway
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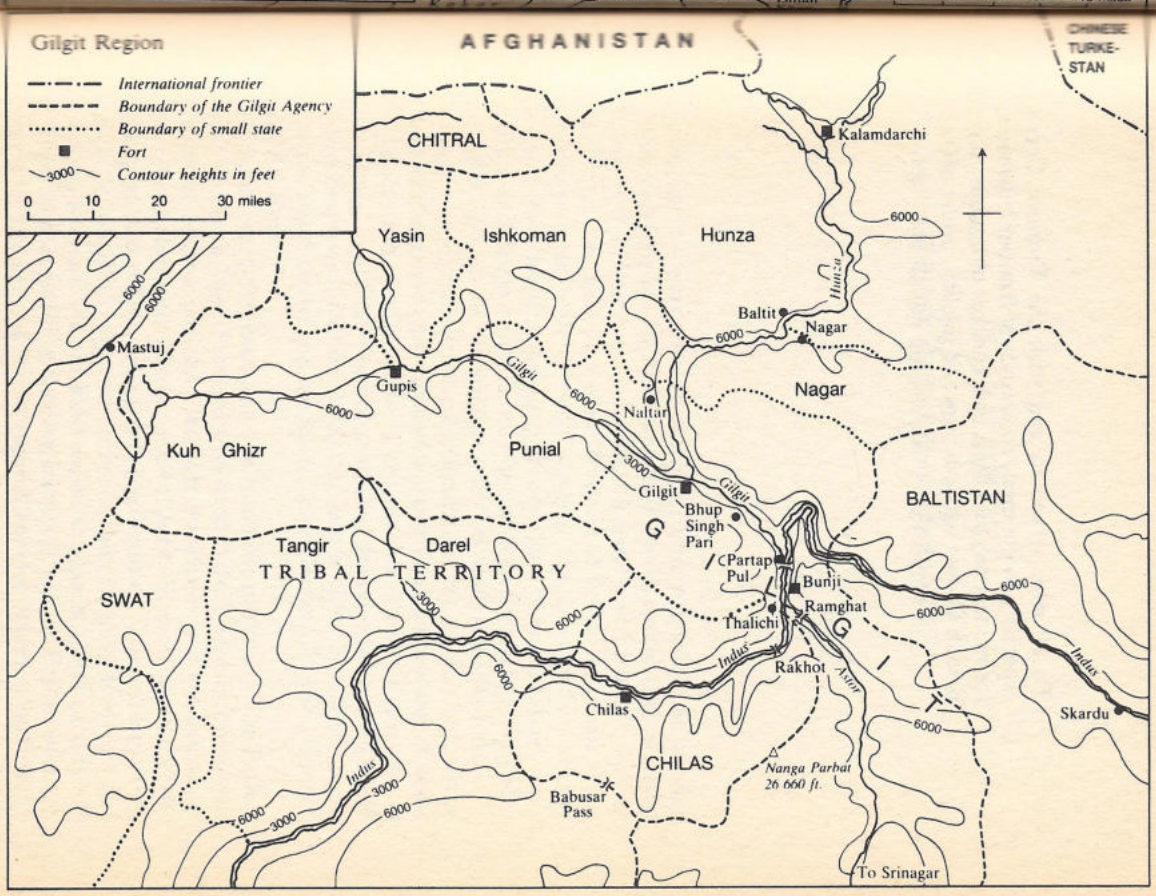
Gilgit Region
International frontier
Boundary of the Gilgit Agency
Boundary of small state
Fort
Contour heights in feet
0 10 20 30 miles
AFGHANISTAN
CHINESE TURKESTAN
CHITRAL
Kalamdarchi
Yasin
Ishkoman
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Partap Pul
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Ramghat
SWAT
Thalichi
Indus
Rakhot
Astor
Skardu
Chilas
CHILAS
Nanga Parbat 26 660 ft.
Babusar Pass
To Srinagar

To all who served in and with the Frontier Corps, and especially to the many thousands of frontier tribesmen who, for modest pay and their own concept of honour, served the British Crown with courage and fidelity, under officers who counted their friendship a high privilege.

Foreword by Philip Mason

This book has two purposes. In the first place, it is meant to provide some record of their life for those who took part in that strange series of adventures – that Homeric alternation of battles and feasts – service with the Scouts on the North-West Frontier of India. But it has also a much wider purpose – to fill one of the gaps of history and let a larger public know how this frontier was guarded, how these men lived – the discomforts and dangers they faced, the compensations they enjoyed – and how they looked on the strange task they had been allotted.

This dual purpose of course is a difficulty for the author. A man who took part in the enterprise will search eagerly for an account of some exploit which made a high point in his own life – but a succession of such incidents would be wearisome to the general reader, who wants only a few examples. The writer has to steer a difficult middle course between too much detail and too little. This Charles Chenevix Trench has skilfully done.

The Scouts were the solution to an insoluble problem. The Pathan tribes of the North-West Frontier presented to the British in India in its most extreme form a difficulty that occurs wherever a central power that governs by law and values peaceful agriculture is confronted by tribal peoples who rely on pillage for their luxuries. The country of the Pathans is much of it craggy and inhospitable, freezing in winter and scorching in summer. It has been called a gigantic slag-heap. It will barely support human life at the simplest level and the Pathan must get the price of a wife or a rifle from somewhere else, whether by force or fraud, by raiding or trading, or simply by blackmail – such as a subsidy

from the government in the plains. The people are as craggy as the country, unswerving in the most fundamental forms of Islam, bitter in the blood-feud, reckless of life. They have never called any man master, preserving an obdurate independence from the rulers of the Punjab and of Afghanistan alike. How can such a people be contained?

Some such problem, I suspect, faced Julius Caesar, when he governed the Roman province that became Provence. He seized the opportunity given him by the migration of a powerful and warlike people who were moving into the territory of other tribes who, though they lived beyond the Roman frontier, were comparatively peaceful and outwardly friendly to Rome. The friendly tribes asked for help; Caesar marched in and went on to conquer Gaul. But it was much easier country than the North-West Frontier.

Caesar's solution was called in India the Forward Policy. From the time when the British first succeeded the Sikhs in control of the Punjab, there were advocates of a Forward Policy; some wanted to introduce the rule of law and administer the tribes right up to the frontier with Afghanistan, while a few fire-eaters would have gone on to Kabul. Others, of whom John Lawrence was the first, believed in a Close Border; they wanted no interference with Afghanistan and as little as possible with the mountain tribes on this side of the international frontier. No one knew exactly where this lay until it was demarcated in 1894, when it became known as the Durand Line.

The Frontier Problem had two aspects. Beyond Afghanistan lay Russia, and the Russian Empire had moved nearly a thousand miles closer in the course of the last century. Russia was the enemy. Was it, from a purely military point of view, wise to let the Russians – when they launched their attack – struggle through the mountains and the tribes of Afghanistan and to fight them only when they emerged from the passes? Or would it be better to meet them on a line from Kabul to Kandahar?

That was one aspect of the Frontier question. But it was hardly less important to stop the tribes from coming down from their mountains into administered territory, kidnapping Hindu money-lenders, stealing cattle, and abducting women. The British were sensitive about this. Both the Moguls and the Sikhs had provided an extremely loose administration; so long as the taxes came in and there was no open rebellion, they did not worry much about individual grievances. There were severe penalties for murder and burglary but not much was done to detect or to prevent them. But the British valued the tranquillity of the countryside; they believed that a private person's freedom to go

about his business without assault was the justification of their rule. Here again there was controversy; John Lawrence, the supreme advocate of the Close Border, ordered his Deputy Commissioners to keep out of tribal affairs and never to cross the administrative line except to inflict punishment for a raid into administered territory. When punishment had been inflicted, British forces would at once retire. This, said his critics, meant that the tribesmen never saw the representative of the British Government unless he came to burn and kill; it was a policy of 'Butcher and Bolt', and could not possibly lead to anything but growing hostility. In Baluchistan, further south, Robert Sandeman had found it possible to establish some degree of control through tribal leaders. But the Mahsuds and Wazirs are quite different from Baluchi tribes, replied those expert in the ways of the Pathans; they have no tribal leaders in that sense and do no man's bidding.

The controversy never quite died. But eventually a compromise was reached, and it will help to understand the life of the Scouts if this is set out in its essentials, as it existed in the 1930s.

There was the North-West Frontier Province, separated from the Punjab, with a Governor in Peshawar. This consisted of six districts, in charge of six Deputy Commissioners, and was administered not very differently from any other province of British India. Murder was a crime, punishable under the Indian Penal Code; there were magistrates and judges to enforce the Code and they tried criminals under the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act. There was the usual hierarchy of officials under the orders of the Deputy Commissioner. Land Revenue was collected, and there was a normal civil police force to prevent or punish crime, as well as the Frontier Constabulary – who were armed police meant to deal with raiders from across the administrative border. In the last resort, there was the regular army.

Beyond the six districts – on the other side of the administrative line – lay tribal territory, a strip of roughly three hundred miles by one hundred, with the Durand Line and Afghanistan to the North-West. In this area there were no taxes and the Indian Penal Code did not apply as between one tribesman and another. But there were six Political Agents, each responsible for keeping in touch with the tribes allotted to him, for knowing something of their plans, reasoning with them when they planned mischief and punishing them when they committed crimes in the administered districts. If a tribesman crossed the line and committed a crime, or if he murdered a British officer in tribal territory, the Political Agent would arrange with his tribe or section that he should be tried by a Jirga, a tribal gathering. If the Jirga found him

guilty, the Political Agent would pronounce sentence and hold the entire group responsible for its enforcement. It usually meant a fine of so many rifles. At his back, in support when persuasion was not enough, were the Scouts – under various names, the Tochi Scouts, the Kurram Militia, and so on. They were the Political Agent's striking force if needed; their constant duty was also to show the flag, to proclaim the presence of the Government and its right to go up to the Durand Line.

The Scouts were not regular soldiers, though they were organised like the Indian Army in platoons, commanded by junior officers of their own group. A battalion of the Indian Army had only half as many British officers as a British battalion; the platoons were commanded by Indian officers promoted from the ranks with a Viceroy's Commission. The proportion was about one British officer to fifty men. The Scouts went further and there would as a rule be about one British Officer to two hundred men – three only to a Wing, which was more than the equivalent of an infantry battalion. Further, by the end, quite a few of those who had once been British officers were actually Pathans, holding the King's Commission. The Scouts were lightly armed compared with regular troops; they prided themselves intensely on speed and endurance, on moving fast, sleeping rough and being unhampered by baggage. And when they got to the battle, they were as good as any tribesman at taking cover and marksmanship.

That brings us to the most remarkable aspect of the whole paradoxical situation. Except for the very small number of British officers, the Scouts were all Pathans. They enlisted for a fixed period, which was extended if they were promoted, but in any case they went back to live among the tribes from whom they had come. They fought against Pathans – yet they went back and lived among them in honoured retirement.

The British presence in the Punjab deprived the tribesmen of a field for raids and booty. For this the Government paid them compensation in a number of ways, disguised by various pretences. The Scouts were one form of compensation; their pay and pensions were an asset to the tribes and I suspect that, if the question had been properly put to them and if they had really understood it, most of the tribes would have regarded the disappearance of the Scouts as a loss. Another form of compensation consisted of payments to Khassadars, tribesmen who were supposed to keep the roads open, an even more irregular force, men who, as one new Viceroy remarked, guarded you by day and shot at you by night.

To read an account of the tribal areas when the Faqir of Ipi was at

the height of his power might easily suggest that the whole British presence was regarded with unquenchable hate as a foreign army of occupation. This would be to suppose the tribes had a unity and a nationalism which they had not, and also it makes no allowance for their peculiar qualities. They relished danger and to them war was the supreme sport; they had also a strong but distinctly brutal sense of humour. The Scouts provided them with constant opportunities for enjoyable battles and also often appealed to their sense of humour. Tale after tale in Charles Chenevix Trench's book displays their ruthlessness; they showed no mercy and expected none. But when it was over, when the Political Agent had imposed his fine and the kidnapped hostages had gone safely home, they would happily discuss with Scout officers the mistakes either side had made, in the spirit of friendly teams after a football match. They would torture and kill the wounded and mutilate the dead – yet afterwards come to a *tikala* – a feast – and would tell the Political Agent he was their father and mother.

After the South African War, it became possible to buy Martini rifles in the ports of the Persian Gulf. The Afridis round the Khyber Pass invested some of their tribal money in an organisation to buy these rifles and move them secretly across Persia to the Khyber. When the Royal Navy stopped the supply, the Afridis petitioned the Government of India to compensate them for their losses – as though a burglar who had dropped his tools when surprised by the police should ask them to buy him a new set. And after a Scouts battle, the enemy wounded would be brought trustingly into the Civil hospital at Razmak to be stitched up – or even into a Scouts' fort to the Scouts' own hospital.

Among the Scouts themselves, an orderly was expected to stay by his wounded officer and die with him if need be – and he almost always did. What could be more touching than Nat Cosby's story in this book of the boy who would consent to an operation that would save his life only if his Commanding Officer stayed with him? Again and again, personal liking, trust, affection, overcame differences of religion and culture.

Nobody could ever be sure what would happen. A sentry, inflamed by religious zeal, suddenly shot a British officer as he lay sleeping in the open because his feet were disrespectfully turned towards Mecca. Everyone – British and Pathans alike – agreed that the sentry must die. But so that it should not start a blood-feud, there was also agreement that his brother should fire the shot. When it was put to him, the murderer also agreed that this was fitting. So the episode ended decently and in order.

There is paradox upon paradox in any account of this strange situation in which personal relationships so often cut across the Pathan's obstinate determination to keep his hills to himself and his way of life unpolluted. But one overriding element in all that took place was the code of conduct known as Pukhtunwali – what is proper for a Pathan – the code on which Charles Chenevix Trench has, I am sure rightly, laid such emphasis. The essence of it was hospitality and revenge. To allow a guest to be killed was as disgraceful as to leave unavenged the murder of a kinsman. I have heard of a Khassadar who shot his own son in order to protect an English officer whom he was escorting.

In the last half century, we have learnt a great deal not only about human behaviour but about codes of behaviour among animals. Wolves, we are told, are chivalrous to a beaten enemy and to females. In the Maori wars, a truce was observed at sunset so that everyone could fetch water from the river. But in the code of Pukhtunwali, as in everything else, the Pathans seem to have included extremes of ferocity and fidelity to an unusual degree.

The English have generally been successful at getting other people to fight for them and where they have encountered an enemy who was formidable in battle, they have often enlisted the defeated in their own ranks as soon as the war was over. In India, they used Madrassis to conquer Bengal and eventually almost stopped enlisting Madrassis; they used men from Behar and Oudh to conquer the Sikhs – and immediately began to recruit Sikhs. Perhaps their most obviously striking successes were with Highlanders and Gurkhas. But mistakes were made with the Highlanders at first and it was a long time before the Highland regiments were fully accepted as the crack corps that they eventually became. The English have generally been less sensitive to the peculiarities of their Celtic neighbours than to those of Sikhs and Pathans and Arabs, perhaps feeling that it was perverse of anyone so near home to be different at all. There were a number of mutinies in Highland regiments before they settled down into being one of the glories of the British Army.

The Scouts had their troubles too and it may seem to the reader that the early part of this book is a record of failures. There was a problem which could not be avoided. The men had to be trusted; that was the essence of the idea. But it was also necessary to build up a loyalty to the Scout organisation – to the Tochi Scouts or the Kurram Militia or whoever it might be – a loyalty that overrode tribal loyalty. It was eventually decided that, though it was convenient to keep men of one

tribe together in a platoon, any combination of platoons must consist of several tribes. That was perhaps the chief lesson of the first period, which ended with 1919.

It had been a period in which there had been many set-backs, and the worst set-back was the retreat of 1919. How slow the British were to learn that everywhere their ascendancy depended on their keeping up the bluff that their power was permanent and they invincible! None the less, in spite of set-backs, the idea of the Scouts had proved a success. In spite of many anomalies, it was on the whole better not to administer up to the Durand Line but confine British ideas of justice to the districts of the Province, and, beyond the administrative line, to keep only the most elementary order, and that in accordance with Pathan standards of conduct. And only Pathans were used to enforce it and as a first line of defence for their own territory.

The policy was Lord Curzon's, and in broad outline it lasted unchanged until Independence. It was a policy of compromise; the tribes were controlled but neither pacified nor cowed. The Scouts were the chief instrument of the policy and they too had to compromise continually, not only in what they did, but in their methods.

Charles Chenevix Trench has a story which illustrates the difficulties. The Scouts intervened in a battle between Mahsuds and Wazirs, which might have been regarded as none of their business. It was highly dangerous and they had insufficient force. But the Political Agent had used his influence to bring the parties to an agreement – and the agreement had been broken. So the Political Agent was involved and he ordered intervention. A battle was already raging but Scout officers rode forward between the battle-lines and the firing stopped; they made peace. At the feast that followed, a tribesman said reproachfully, 'You should not have attempted that with less than a thousand men.' But it had worked. Sometimes, too, the Scouts turned a blind eye and did rather less than they should have done according to the book.

In methods, too, there was continual interplay between British ideas of military discipline and the special qualities needed by irregulars – rapid movement, swift deployment, use of cover and so on. A new commandant might lay more emphasis on one than the other, but everyone recognised that both were essential. Discipline went together with spit-and-polish and in such a force as this – tribesmen keeping tribesmen in order – discipline was a matter of life and death. But the Scouts must also be able to move as well on the hill, to shoot as straight and move as fast and as far in a day as any Pathan – and in all these respects be better than any regular soldier!

This book does not attempt to discuss such questions as control of the Frontier from the air or the value to the British Army, as well as the Indian, of this superb training ground for mountain warfare. What it aims to do, and does, is to set out in vivid colloquial language what the Scouts did and how it seemed from their own point of view. Much of it is told in their own words and they did not as a rule much concern themselves about the wisdom of the policy they were carrying out and whether there was any alternative. It was not their job to ask questions. This surely makes it the more valuable as a record. It is a remarkable record, of courage and devotion to duty, but also of good humour and laughter and affection, between officers and men, between hunters and hunted. Not the least extraordinary part is that so few met such faithful co-operation from so many. Those who took part in it are entitled to remember it with pride.

Acknowledgments

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Many former officers of the Frontier Corps and the Indian Political Service have contributed photographs, accounts of their experiences, official reports, training instructions, unit standing orders, unit newsletters and much miscellaneous information. A list of all their names would be interminable, and to single out a few would be invidious; but I must mention two who have done so much to organise and facilitate my research – Lieut. Colonel D. R. Venning and Major H. R. Hutchins.

Not having been in Frontier Corps myself, I was entirely dependent on all these officers for detail and atmosphere. Without their help this book could not possibly have been written. Without the help and advice

of Mr Philip Mason who read and re-read the manuscript as it developed and who has written the Foreword, it would never have been published.

To all contributors and helpers, whether or not named above, and to the staff of the India Office and Records, I am sincerely grateful.

1984

C.C.T.

Prologue

An Incident, 1920

Sixty Indian soldiers occupied a permanent picquet, a miniature fort built of drystone walls, on a hill overlooking a road which passed along the Tochi Valley in North Waziristan. Day after day they cooked, cleaned their rifles, dozed, chatted desultorily about their villages and their cattle and stared with lacklustre eyes at the bleak hills and the road winding below them. Nothing ever happened, nothing ever moved except a string of camels along the road, a boy herding goats on the hillside, a scavenging raven, a hawk hovering stiff-winged in the cloudless sky.

Every morning at first light ten men were sent for the day to a feature overlooking the picquet. It became a routine move, carelessly carried out. No enemy had been seen for weeks; there was no report of hostiles for miles. Although to reach that feature the ten men had to pass through a few yards of 'dead' ground invisible from the main position, they had only eighty yards to go. For convenience they took the same route every day.

Unseen watchers observed all this, and a gang of Pathans of the Mahsud tribe, camping in a cave nine miles away, determined to ambush those ten men in the few yards of dead ground. On the first night they reached their ambush position in good time, but a shooting star fell in an unlucky direction, so their leader took them home. The second night, a river they had to ford was in spate. On the third night a dog barked as they passed close to a village, so the leader, thinking that the bark might have alarmed a sentry, again took them home. On the fourth night all went well, until just before dawn the youngest

squatted to pee. Surely any sentry worthy of the name, less than a hundred yards away, must have heard! Back they went to the cave again. The fifth night every man was provided with a dwarf-palm frond down which to direct, silently, his flow. At first light the ten soldiers left their comrades and strolled into the dead ground. A volley at point-blank range, another blast of fire to keep heads down in the picquet, a rush to knife the wounded and grab the rifles – and the gang was safely away. Truly, as Pathans say, patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet.

The small disaster passed unnoticed in the Press. But some who heard of it might have wondered why those soldiers were occupying, clearly against the wish of its inhabitants, one of the most useless areas in Asia; what they were supposed to achieve there; and why an army, which two years before had helped demolish the German, Austrian and Turkish Empires, should suffer a defeat, however small, by a few ragged bandits who owned nothing more valuable than their rifles.

The answer to these questions can be found in fifty years' history of what was regarded as the most vital and most vulnerable frontier of the British Empire.

I

The Problem

By their conquest of the Sikhs, completed in 1848, the British acquired the Punjab, pride and backbone of British India. They acquired also its insoluble problem, the North-West Frontier.

Seen from India, the Frontier consisted first of the river Indus which seems to serve it in the office of a moat, but has never proved a very effective one. Beyond it was an irregular jumble of plains and foothills, fertile where they could be watered, shaped by the spurs of the great Suliman Range. Beyond these towered the mountains themselves, from the eternal snows, alpine pastures and forests in the north, through the lower, harsher mountains of Waziristan where rocky outcrops a mere 10,000 feet high petered out in scrub-covered foothills and ravines, to the desolation of Zhob and Mekran. The mountains were an effective rampart against invasion, provided the passes were held.

While the terrain made administration difficult, the characteristics of the people made government by infidels and foreigners almost impossible. In the extreme north the tribes of the Hindu Kush are hardy mountaineers but not particularly truculent. In the extreme south the Baluchis, Brahuis and Pathan tribes of Baluchistan gave little trouble provided they were left, more or less, to run their own affairs through their own tribal authorities, which were more or less obeyed. The problem was how to deal with the Pathan tribes between Chitral and Baluchistan. By tradition and inclination, in some cases through economic necessity, they were predators; as Moslem fanatics they fiercely resisted rule by Sikh or Christian; and as the ultimate demo-

crats, with no man acknowledging another as master, they were difficult to hold to any agreement.

Neither the Amir of Afghanistan, nor the Sikhs, nor the British wanted more than spheres of influence in the mountains. As a safeguard against Russia, the British gained control of the Khyber, Kurram and Bolan Passes, but this did not help them control the Pathan tribes.

The best way of pacifying the Frontier, as has always been obvious and has in fact been proved by the Government of Pakistan, is to provide the tribesmen with education and economic opportunities superior to those gained by raiding. But it is the problem of the chicken and the egg. Which comes first, economic development or some approximation to law and order? To the guardians of the Victorian Empire the answer had to be law and order.

There were two obvious ways of dealing with the tribesmen. The 'Close Border policy', pursued until the end of the nineteenth century, aimed to govern the plains and leave the hills as a sort of human 'nature reserve'. When the denizens of it became too troublesome – killing and kidnapping the dwellers in the plains, driving off their cattle and raping their women – they were subjected to punitive expeditions into a hostile tribe's country which killed a few of the men, blew up the fortified towers, pulled down the terraces of the fields, extracted a fine in cash and firearms, and then withdrew. This procedure was irreverently known as 'Butcher and Bolt'.

Alternatively there was the 'Forward Policy' of occupying and administering the country right up to the Durand Line, the international boundary agreed and demarcated with Afghanistan in 1893. Only in Baluchistan was this successfully carried out by a loose system of indirect rule through the tribal Sardars.

To the lucid mind of Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905, 'Butcher and Bolt' was undignified, unproductive and unacceptable; but half a century's experience, including some thirty punitive expeditions, had proved to most people that the Forward Policy along the whole Frontier was impossible with the resources at India's disposal. Besides, if the tribes on the Indian side of the Durand Line were disarmed and tamed, a large army would have to be permanently employed in protecting them from their unreconstructed neighbours, heavily armed, on the Afghan side. Moreover there was among middle-rank and junior officers a feeling – which did not make policy but contributed to the climate of opinion in which policy was made – that if the Frontier was always at peace, India would be a much duller place;

and that the army benefited immeasurably from annual war-games with the best umpire in the world, who never let a mistake go unpunished.

So there developed a compromise policy. There was an Administered Border of British India, enclosing the fertile plains and lower foothills, to the east of which were all the blessings of civilisation, especially law and order based on the Indian Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code, while to the west, up to the Durand Line, was an area known as Tribal Territory, or more aptly Yaghistan, the Land of the Outlaws. The Army was held back in cantonments in British India, while in Tribal Territory Political Agents would, without attempting to administer the tribes, do what they could to wean them from their wicked ways.

The Pathan is an individualist whose relations with others are governed by a code of custom and honour known as Pukhtunwali which confers on him certain rights and requires of him certain duties. The most important of the duties is badal, vengeance; he *must* exact vengeance, at any risk and at all cost, for an insult or injury done to himself, his family, his clan or his tribe. If he dies, then they must take up the quarrel. Disputes over women, gold, and land – *zan, zar, zamin* – are at the bottom of most blood-feuds, but the feud continues, with murders and reprisals, long after its origin is forgotten. The Pathan may wait years for his chance, but take it he must, sooner or later, or be utterly shamed.

The duty of badal is modified by the right of Nanawati, which means 'coming in'. A Pathan must extend asylum and protection to anyone who asks for it, even to an enemy. In extreme cases the man seeking Nanawati appears before his foe bare-headed, with the Koran on his head, and a tuft of grass in his mouth indicating that he is his protector's animal; he may bring a sheep as peace-offering, or produce his wife unveiled. Nanawati sought with the Koran is never refused, but to seek it from an enemy is indelible disgrace.

The third element of Pukhtunwali is melmastia, hospitality, which must be offered to any who seek it, invited or uninvited, Pathan or foreigner, Moslem or Unbeliever. It includes food, lodging, entertainment, protection often far beyond what the host can afford. The host is responsible for his guest's safety so long as he remains in the tribal area, to the extent of providing a badragga, escort, who should protect the guests even at the cost of their own lives. There is the case of a Pathan who, to protect his guest, the Political Agent, shot his own

son. The saying that a Pathan will do anything for gold except betray a guest is generally, but not always, proved true.

A Pathan is furthermore bound by Pukhtunwali to protect hamsayas, 'persons sharing the same shade', who may be non-Pathans, or Pathans of another tribe. They include mullahs, barbers, Sikh merchants, Hindu moneylenders, Punjabi artisans, musicians and others whose role is to help maintain the social structure and do the jobs which Pathans are incapable of doing, too proud to do or too involved with tribal affairs.

In Tribal Territory there is not what is generally understood as law and order, nor is there sheer chaos and anarchy – although there would be were it not for the Pukhtunwali code which sets a standard of behaviour to which the Pathan at least aspires. He may not invariably observe the code, when his interests or his passions are too strong, but he will think twice before flagrantly defying it. It was thanks only to Pukhtunwali that a Political Agent could travel with a fair degree of safety through Tribal Territory protected only by a badragga provided by his hosts, the Maliks of the local tribe. If he were shot the murderer would in theory, and often in practice, be exposed to tribal sanctions and the host-Maliks exacting badal. Only the most dedicated Ghazi, burning to kill an infidel, or a man almost out of his mind with some real or fancied grievance, would take the risk of shooting. In 1893 the Political Agent, North Waziristan was attacked while actually eating a meal in a Malik's house; in 1945 the Political Agent, South Waziristan was kidnapped without his badragga firing a shot in his defence. Both cases were thought to have brought shame on the tribe, which took action against the offenders.

In other ways the Pukhtunwali code made the maintenance of law and order very difficult. Thus if a man committed murder in British India and sought asylum across the Border, he *must* be given it, and it would be a gross insult to his host's honour to molest him. But he would be expected, if his sojourn was prolonged, to earn his keep by, say, guiding raids into the country which he knew. An important trans-Border Pathan could, if he were that sort of man, have a dozen hamsayas bound to him by these obligations, combined bodyguards and hit-men. It was reckoned that there were seldom less than a thousand outlaws from British India safely established in Yaghistan. Moreover the blood-feud was a brake on economic progress. How could a man whose life-tenure was as insecure as a trans-Border tribesman's borrow capital for irrigation, drainage, terracing, orchards, improved livestock or any business enterprise? If he could

lay hands on any cash, most of it must be spent on weapons and fortified towers.

The problem was aggravated by free coming and going across the Durand Line. About half the Pathans lived west of the Line, in Afghanistan; some troublesome tribes straddled it, others migrated every autumn to the Indus plains and returned every spring to the Uplands of Central Asia. Nothing was easier for a malefactor on one side of the Line than to find refuge on the other.

Since a Pathan's survival depended on shooting first, veracity and fidelity, outside the Pukhtunwali code, and adherence to the principles of fair play, came low in the scale of virtues. It made good sense to shoot an enemy in the back, so he could not get his shot in first, and with a dum-dum* bullet which made a bigger hole. It was common prudence to kill also his women and children, for female snakes produce little snakes, which in time grow into big snakes. (Singularly enough Mahsuds and Wazirs, in other respects the most recalcitrant of Pathans, drew the line at killing women and children.)

In war the Pathan was always crafty, and more formidable in dashing, slashing attack than in dour defence. Discipline was not his strong point. He enjoyed a reputation for Islamic fanaticism, but his adherence to the prophet's teaching was as selective as the average Englishman's to that of Jesus Christ. The Zakka Khel Afridis, for instance, are reputed to have murdered a holy man passing through their country in order to have possession of his shrine and grave as a lucrative centre for pilgrimage in their midst. Only when the Mullahs preached from the fifth verse of the ninth *Sura* of the Koran, 'When the sacred months are past, kill those who join other gods with God wheresoever ye find them', was the Pathan eager to respond.

Theologians might point out that Christians were not idolators like Hindus, Sikhs and Kafirs, but were Ahl-i-Kitab, People of the Book, worshippers of the One God, though lamentably unsound on the vital matter of His One-ness; and that the Prophet had specifically ordered that Moslems respect and protect them. Such hair-splitting was not for the ordinary Pathan.

In war the Pathan generally obeyed approved leaders of his own section and tribe; in peace it was his pride to obey no one. The British, when new to the Frontier, assumed that the tribal Maliks were chiefs 'able to say to one "come" and he cometh, to another "go" and he goeth'.

* Soft-nosed bullets, first manufactured in the Ordnance Factory at Dum-Dum near Calcutta, for use by the British Army *against* Pathans. Banned by the Geneva Convention in the face of strong British protests.

This was not the case outside Baluchistan and the Northern States of Dir and Swat. To the tribes of the Mohmand border, the Tirah and Waziristan a Malik was merely a negotiator with Government and any agreement he made could be challenged and ignored by any adult tribesman. His authority was no more than that conferred by personality and wealth. True authority rested only with the Jirga, an assembly in which every man of the tribe might play an equal part, though of course some were more equal than others.

Pathan characteristics were naturally stronger in the trans-Frontier tribes, that is those resident in Tribal Territory, than in the cis-Frontier tribes who for fifty years had enjoyed or put up with Pax Britannica. Of all Pathans the Mahsuds of central Waziristan were the most difficult, followed closely by their neighbours and cousins the Wazirs, by the Afridis of the Tirah and the Mohmands north of Tirah. No trans-Frontier Pathan, except for the Turi tribe, and very few within British India, felt any real loyalty to a remote and infidel Government, or indeed to any Indian Government, for they never regarded themselves as Indians or their country as part of India. However, there were innumerable individuals and families, especially among cis-Frontier tribesmen, in whom self-interest, some appreciation of the benefits of paternal government, recruitment in the army, *esprit de corps* and, above all, devotion to individual officers, produced attitudes which could easily be mistaken for loyalty to the Raj. This was particularly apparent among cis-Frontier Khattaks, Bangash, and Yusufzais, whom the Army regarded as the most reliable Pathans and first-class soldiers.

'Unarmed', says a Pathan proverb, 'you are my enemy'. To carry out the duties enjoined on them by the Pukhtunwali code, to follow their calling as freebooters and to defend their precious independence, the trans-Frontier tribes were armed to the teeth. Up to the end of the nineteenth century their weapons were the curved sword, a long, straight knife and the jezail, a long-barrelled matchlock, better than the musket with which the Army was armed until mid-century, but not as good as the Snider, Martini-Henry or Lee Metford rifles. By the end of the century they had acquired by theft, capture or purchase from Afghan soldiers a fair number of modern rifles, and what they lacked in fire-power, they made up in fieldcraft, cunning and the guerilla warrior's secret weapon, patience.

Such people were not markedly amenable to the Political Agent's admonitions, even when these were reinforced by financial inducements to good behaviour which exasperated soldiers compared to Danegeld. These included contracts for the supply of mutton and

firewood, allowances to Maliks which could be stopped if not earned, and good silver rupees paid out for making and repairing roads which opened up Tribal Territory for trade and military expeditions. The Frontier Crime Regulations laid down procedures which could be used to emphasise the Political Agent's wishes. Legal sanction was given to trial by Jirga, according to Shariat, the Islamic law code which lays as much emphasis on compensation to the victim of a crime as on punishment of the criminal, and accepts the principle that if an individual cannot be brought to book, his family, section* or tribe must pay for his offence. When, therefore, a tribe's cup of iniquity was full, the Jirga would be required to hand over the kidnapped Hindus and abducted women, and produce the miscreants responsible for murders, robberies and rapes, or pay compensation for these outrages. Pressure could be applied by the arrest of prominent tribesmen whose friends and relations would use their influence to expedite the Jirga's deliberations; by the seizure of the tribe's livestock; or by a blockade cutting off the tribe from trade with British India and preventing its seasonal migrations.

For all these purposes, to discourage raids and escort caravans, the Political Agent needed an armed and disciplined force composed wholly or partly of local tribesmen. Thus were raised corps collectively known as Frontier Corps, Militias or Scouts. Only if these failed did the Army send in a punitive expedition.

* The clans and septs of which a tribe is composed are known as sections and sub-sections.

2

Poachers Turned Gamekeeper, 1878–1904

Those who, as a result of Lord Curzon's Frontier reforms,* in 1900, formed the Frontier Corps had encouraging precedents. In 1878 an irregular corps had been raised from local tribesmen, mainly Afridis, to protect traffic moving through the Khyber Pass, piqueting the hills on either side, escorting the long strings of camels between the Afghan Frontier and Fort Jamrud at the eastern end of the Pass. They were *very* irregular, unshaven, unkempt, with no uniform but a red tag sewn on to the back of the pagri to distinguish them from those whose principal pleasure and livelihood it was their duty to prohibit. They were armed with the jezail, and were at first known as the Khyber Jezailchis. Their Commandant, Major Sardar Mohamed Aslam, was a man of character and ability; moreover he was an Afghan of the Sadozai section of the royal Durani tribe, and as the Afridis supported the Sadozai claim to the throne, his prestige was enormous. He set about training and disciplining the Jezailchis. Snider rifles replaced the jezails and they were renamed the Khyber Rifles. They were provided with practical, loose-fitting khaki uniforms and a Mounted Infantry troop was added to the original infantry companies.

If it is surprising to find, in the heyday of the Victorian Raj, an Afghan major commanding a celebrated corps, it is surely astonishing that his friend and close collaborator, the Political Agent of the Khyber, Captain of the Empire's very gate, was what would then be termed disparagingly a 'half-caste'. But Robert Warburton, son of an Irish

* These reforms included severing the Frontier from the Punjab and setting up a separate North-West Frontier Province (NWFP).

father and an Afghan mother, was an unusual Eurasian. Among his colleagues and superior officers Anglo-Indian colour-prejudice conflicted with Anglo-Indian snobbery, and snobbery won; he was deemed officially and socially acceptable, for his mother was a Princess. He was also a very able man, and since Pushtu, the language of the people, and Persian, a status-symbol among Pathans, were literally his mother-tongues, he was spared the strain and mental fatigue inseparable from conducting all business in a very difficult foreign language. He not merely liked and admired but loved his Afridis, while recording in detail their murders, treacheries and tergiversations. He always went unarmed among them and they never let him down, but gave him countless proofs of friendship. In later years it was considered that no Political Agent could stand the strain of dealing with trans-Frontier tribesmen for more than four or five consecutive years. For Warburton the strain was much less, and he stood – enjoyed – seventeen years as Political Agent, Khyber, acquiring in that time a wonderful knowledge of the Afridis. However, he failed to see that their loyalty was personal to *him*, or in the case of the Khyber Rifles, to Mohamad Aslam and the corps. It was not to the Queen Empress. He himself never doubted that the British Raj was God's greatest gift to mankind.

> Wider still and wider, shall thy bounds be set.
> God who made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet.

That sentiment was accepted by Colonel Warburton, and in his more euphoric moods he convinced himself that it was accepted also by his Afridis.

Early in the corps' history there occurred an event to which those in authority should have paid more attention. In 1882, for purely administrative reasons, it was decided that the fort at Ali Masjid, garrisoned by a company of the Malik Din Khel section of Afridis, should be abandoned and the company moved to Jamrud. Promptly a Subadar and a Jemadar (corps officers) concluded that the Government was on the run and went round, Koran in hand, urging their men to desert with rifles rather than obey the order. A Havildar (sergeant) defied them and managed to get the company back to Jamrud. The lesson should have been plain; an entire company should not be composed of a single section of a tribe like the Afridis; and trans-Frontier Pathans, in their own country, were not reliable when withdrawal was in the wind.

Apart from this incident, the Khyber Rifles seemed to justify

Warburton's and Mohamad Aslam's pride in them. They made the Khyber far safer than the environs of Peshawar. When the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Roberts, and his Quarter Master General, with the Political Agent, rode from end to end of what was reputedly the most dangerous pass in Asia, escorted only by two troopers of the Khyber Rifles, the Quarter Master General said, 'If this were to be told in England, or to any officer of the old Punjab school, they would never believe it.'

Although the terms of their service did not require them to serve outside the Khyber, the corps volunteered for the Black Mountain expeditions of 1888 and 1891. They took a prominent part in all major actions and won half-a-dozen gallantry medals. On their return the Peshawar Municipality gave them a civic reception and dinner.

The Pathan officers of the corps were notable warriors, many wearing medals won in wars from China to Egypt. One, Subadar Mursil, bore on his body the scars of thirty wounds. It was a proud moment for Warburton and Mohamad Aslam when the Khyber Rifles marched past the Viceroy as smart as Guardsmen on the parade for the presentation of the Indian Order of Merit to the Subadar Major. At the last moment it was discovered, to Warburton's consternation, that no ribbon had been sent with the medal. What could be done? A Sikh, a *Sikh* Orderly Officer to the Viceroy took off his own IOM ribbon for the Afridi. Such was the spirit of the old Indian Army.

The Khyber Rifles even maintained a sort of precursor of present-day Boys' Companies. It was quite unofficial, but paraded, saluted and turned out Guards of Honour for distinguished visitors.

Mohamad Aslam soldiered on until he was quite unfit for active service, and he insisted on commanding in the Black Mountain expeditions. Somehow the unofficial commander of the unofficial Boys' Company, an active, handsome twelve-year-old, managed to go too, and helped the Commandant up the hill in an attack.

'Get away, boy, get away!' the old man panted, 'you'll be killed.'

'Never mind if I am,' said the lad, 'you can throw my body into the nearest ravine.'

Robert Warburton believed that no other Pathan could command the Khyber Rifles. Only a Sadozai would have the prestige; with any other, they would all be quarrelling among themselves. Again and again he begged the Government to appoint a British second-in-command who could learn the job from Mohamad Aslam and then take over. This was done, but far too late, just before the great Afridi War of 1897 which consisted of a cumbrous, hard-fought invasion of the Tirah, the

mountain-heartland of the Afridis, followed by a somewhat undignified and hasty withdrawal while winter closed in. Warburton believed it need never have happened, and would not have happened had not he and Mohamad Aslam both retired. On 'a day of shame and humiliation for every Englishman in India', the new Commandant, Captain Barton, was given a direct order, allowing him no discretion, to forsake his men and seek safety in Jamrud. Most of the Khyber Rifles posts were over-run and burnt; but the garrison of Landi Kotal, under the much-wounded, much-decorated Subadar Mursil, who had one son with him and two with the enemy, put up an epic defence, killing one hundred and eighteen of their kith-and-kin until, when Mursil was killed, they capitulated.

There followed the Tirah Expedition, a personal tragedy for Warburton who was recalled from retirement to act as Political Officer to the column which fought its way into his friends' country. Four men of the Khyber Rifles, all Afridis, acted as his orderlies,

> and also as scouts and guides. All proved faithful and loyal, although working against their own countrymen. When it is remembered that they were literally carrying their lives hourly in their hands, and knew the cruel certain fate which awaited them if they were taken prisoners, I do not think I exaggerate when I say . . . that no men better earned the Victoria Cross.

The Khyber Rifles were deployed in numerous small blockhouses, from which they could watch and protect caravan traffic through the Pass. The most unpopular of these blockhouses was that in which, one freezing night, the entire garrison had perished, asphyxiated by the fumes of their charcoal stove. A visitor to another at the turn of the century, Michni Kandao, wrote:

> The line of white boulders on the hill across the dip were range-stones. Ten white stones at a thousand yards, nine at nine hundred. They were too big for Khyber marksmen to waste powder on, so there are small white slabs, the size of your hat, laid parallel with them for rifle practice. I saw the men turn out to shoot. The Afridi on his own heath, or scree, is part of the earth, like a markhor or chamois, whether it is fanged-rock or a shelf of sliding shale, it is all the same. Elbow and knee are firm and easy as the rifle comes up and he takes his sight. One feels that the weapon is as much a provision of nature as horn, tooth or claw . . .

When they had pounded the small white stone to pieces, w climbed up the iron ladder into the blockhouse. The sweet scent fro the wood fire and hot chapattis greeted me from inside. The lon low-raftered room with the smooth boards, wooden supports an ladder leading up by a trap-door to another floor, and above all th smell of the flour, reminded me of an old water-mill.

In 1908 this blockhouse was attacked by a horde of Afghans. Th night was black as ink, and the besiegers were under the walls and layin a charge of gunpowder when the garrison took off their shirts, soake them in oil, lit them and threw them over the parapet. In the flare the shot down twenty Afghans.

In the Zakka Khel campaign of 1908, all the Zakka Khel in th Khyber Rifles were paraded by the Political Agent and told that the would not be made to fight against their own people; every man migh take six months' leave, and when he came back no questions would b asked. None took advantage of this offer.

The Khyber Rifles were reckoned on all counts to be a success, and i trans-Frontier Afridis could be made into a useful local militia, surely this could be done elsewhere. In Baluchistan Sir Robert Sandeman, th Agent to the Governor General, was, indeed, already doing it. The lynch-pin of his system of indirect rule was at first a force similar to th Khyber Jezailchis. With the annexation of the Zhob in 1889, he formed a much more military force, the Zhob Levy Corps, irregular but uniformed, armed with Government Martinis, trained and more or less disciplined. It was composed of local Pathans, Pathans from further north, and wild Brahui nomads from the desert south-west of Quetta; and it was commanded by an Indian Army major seconded to the Political Department and under Sandeman's orders. Later the corps was renamed the Zhob Militia and, in the somewhat less exacting conditions of Baluchistan where the tribal authorities had some control over their young men, it did very useful work.

In 1892–3 in the Kurram Valley, north of Waziristan and west of the Tirah, an energetic captain, G. O. Roos-Keppel, formed the local Turi tribesmen into a similar force known as the Kurram Militia. But here there was a difference. The Turi tribe are Shiahs, entirely surrounded by Sunnis, and there is no feud more bitter than that between these Moslem sects. The Turis were the trusties of the Sarkar, equivalent to the Campbells in seventeenth-century Scotland. They had besought the British Government to take over their country and protect them, and as a result the Government had introduced a loose administration

into the Kurram Valley, based on a Political Agent at Parochinar and the Kurram Militia. The Turis were no less tough than their neighbours (another analogy with the Campbells), no less observant of Pukhtunwali, but they were reliable; so much so that the government kept at Parochinar a reserve of 3,000 rifles for issue to the Turi tribal lashkar, their armed force, in times of trouble.

The advance in 1891 from Gilgit to Hunza and Nagar against very tough opposition, which planted the Union Jack on the Roof of the World, had been a classic example of Victorian empire-building, with the Political Agent shot by a garnet fired from a jezail and many deeds of daring rewarded by three VCs and numerous other decorations. In 1895 the Empire had watched with bated breath the desperate defence, against overwhelming odds, of Chitral Fort and the painfully slow progress through snow-bound passes of the relief columns. Thereafter the Hunza and Nagar tribesmen had reverted to peaceful peasants, their raiding parties no longer the scourge of Central Asia, and the Mehtar (prince) of Chitral had abandoned the amiable practice of securing each succession by the wholesale slaughter of sons, brothers and nephews.

Lord Curzon, something of an expert on the Pamirs and the Hindu Kush (unique among Viceroys and policy-makers, he had actually ridden and walked over them), took very seriously the danger of invasion from Russian Turkestan, through the narrow panhandle of the Afghan Wakhan and over the Hindu Kush. The history of Russian expansion emphasised the danger. It is the task of general staffs to plan for the worst possible eventuality, which here would be Russian and Afghan invasion, assisted by the Pathans of Dir and Swat through which must pass any force moving up from India to Chitral. There were at least three routes – by the Killick pass into Gilgit and the Baroghil and Dorah passes into Chitral – which could be easily defended, but if left undefended were perfectly practicable for trained mountain troops with mule transport.

It was against such a contingency that the local Political Agent suggested in 1900 the formation of a part-time militia of 'trained cragsmen' from the tough mountaineers of Chitral. It was a proposal after Lord Curzon's heart, a loyal militia defending their own country until regular troops could arrive, and it was the genesis of the Chitral Scouts, tribesmen armed with modern rifles, trained for one month a year and providing at a very small cost a tripwire which could at least delay an incursion. In 1913 the Gilgit Scouts were raised on similar lines with a similar role.

The core of the Frontier problem was Waziristan, and in particular it two largest tribes, the Mahsuds* of South Waziristan, and the Wazir The Political Agent of North Waziristan, from his headquarters i Bannu, and the Political Agent of South Waziristan, from his head quarters in Tank, employed local levies who were quite useless bu retained on the pay roll in the hope that they would thereby be kept ou of mischief; the Political Agents had tried to influence them through their Maliks, but several 'loyal' Maliks had been murdered as a warnin to others.

Wazirs and Mahsuds are related, but were seldom on good term except when up to something which had no relish of salvation in it. Wazirs were semi-nomadic, Mahsuds more settled, but neither could make much of a success of cultivating their stony soil; they found it easier to make a living by trading, easier still by raiding. The Wazir has been compared to a leopard, a loner, cunning and dangerous; the Mahsud to a wolf, most to be feared in a pack, with a pack-mentality, single-mindedness and persistence. Even among Pathans the Mahsud is notoriously treacherous, something that he himself will not deny. 'We are a very untrustworthy people,' he will say with a sly grin and not without pride, as though this excused every misdemeanour. In 1900 the Wazir fighting strength was reckoned at 27,000, of whom 15,000 had firearms; the Mahsud at 18,000 of whom 14,000 had firearms.

Both tribes were very difficult to handle. Their rapacity was insatiable, and promoted in their dealings with the Sarkar by a loquaciousness which knew no fatigue and no time-factor, allied to an amazing plausibility in argument. Robert Bruce, a great Frontier officer whose past experience, however, had been mainly in Baluchistan, tried to systematise the *sarishta*, the tribal pecking-order under which duties, subsidies and contracts were distributed among Maliks according to their influence. Try as they would to distribute benefits according to the recipients' deserts, Bruce's successors always came up against the *sarishta* system, a departure from which would cause infinite resentment. Merit often went unrewarded while iniquity prospered, and grievances arising from this were a common cause of murder and rebellion.

It was against this background that the North Waziristan Militia and South Waziristan Militia (also known as Northern and Southern Waziristan Militias) were formed in 1900, poachers engaged as game-

* They call themselves Dré Mahsud, Dré Mahsit in their own dialect, 'Three Mahsuds', because they are divided into three sections, Alizai, Bahlolzai and Shaman Khel, each with several sub-sections.

keepers, similar to the Black Watch in eighteenth-century Scotland. Old frontier hands were not lacking who said it was mad to give modern rifles to Mahsuds and Wazirs. But Lord Curzon insisted that trained and disciplined corps, with British officers, would be very different from the 'old salaried loafers and ruffians' of the levies. They would not be part of the army, but would be controlled by the Political Agents and the Chief Commissioner. The officers would be seconded from the Indian Army to the Political Department.

Each corps consisted initially of 850 Pathans, soon increased to 1,850, half trans-Frontier, half cis-Frontier, divided into two Wings of approximately battalion strength, and 150 Mounted Infantry (MI). They were armed with Martini rifles. Each corps had six British officers, two to each Wing, the Commandant, and the Adjutant/Quartermaster who also commanded the Mounted Infantry – volunteers for what was likely to be 'a short life, if an exciting one'.

They took over from the Army all posts in Waziristan except Jandola. Their duties included: garrisoning posts and piqueting roads; repulse and pursuit of raiders; guarding prisoners and treasure; escorting officers; protection of contractors for road-making; reconnaissance; guide work of all sorts; obtaining political information; arrest of offenders.

The North Waziristan Militia, with its headquarters in Miranshah, was distributed in posts along the east-west road from Bannu to Datta Khel (about sixty miles) and the south-north road linking that with Thal in the Lower Kurram. The nearest army garrison was in Bannu. The South Waziristan Militia with headquarters in Wana had to protect two routes from Murtaza to Wana. The nearest military garrison was in Jandola. Despite warnings that banding together well-armed Pathans outside army control was asking for trouble, in September 1904 the experiment was officially described as 'satisfactory beyond all our expectations'.

Perhaps expectations had not been very high. Even so, within the limitations of their sketchy training, with no time to develop any *esprit de corps* and with many lessons to learn, the Waziristan Militia corps reduced raids across the Administered Border and introduced the shadow, the vague idea, of law and order at least along the roads and in the vicinity of their cramped, unhealthy, flea- and fly-ridden mud forts. But years of modest success for the gamekeeper restraining his friends and relatives from poaching make dull reading; the good stories are provided by the occasions, few but invested with high drama, when the gamekeeper reverted to poacher.

With hindsight one can see that it was unwise to put any trust in Mahsuds. They had a well-established reputation for treachery; the British controlled not a yard of their territory, and so had no hold over them. Wazirs were rather different: quite a lot of their territory was under British control, and the militiamen's families and properties were to some extent hostages for their good behaviour. Many Wazirs served the Sarkar well and with great fidelity, and they were valued for their smartness and local knowledge. Also they bore no love for Afridis. The inclusion of both these difficult tribes in the corps was some safeguard against concerted treachery.

3

Gamekeepers Turned Poacher, 1904–5

British officers particularly liked Mahsuds. There were three Mahsud companies, each about one hundred men strong, in the South Waziristan Militia and one company in the North Waziristan Militia, attracted by the princely pay (ten rupees a month without rations), and the prestige of carrying a modern rifle. Because of their volatile temperament for good and bad, commanding Mahsuds was a challenge for any officer. In September 1904, the very month the experiment was described as 'satisfactory beyond all our expectations', a shot rang out in the middle of the night at the South Waziristan Militia post of Sarwekai. Investigation disclosed that the wall-sentry was missing and the Political Agent, Captain J. B. Bowring, who for coolness had been sleeping on the roof, lay dead on his blood-soaked sheets.

As men milled round in understandable confusion, two shots from the control tower of the keep indicated where the murderer had gone, and that he would not tamely give himself up. He was, it transpired, Sepoy Kabul Khan, of the Abdur Rahman Khel sub-section of the Bahlolzai section of Mahsuds.

Everyone was ordered under cover until daylight, when men of other tribes started sniping at the loopholes in the tower, from which an occasional shot was returned. The British and Pathan officers took counsel. No one questioned that the murderer must die. But how? To storm the keep would cost many lives. To starve him out would be a long-drawn-out business, bad for morale and a considerable strain on the Mahsuds' loyalty. The most awkward question was, who should be put to executing him? There was the gravest danger of the corps being

rent with blood-feuds as the Abdur Rahman Khel sepoys took vengeance on the executioner and his tribe took reprisals.

The Post Subadar, an Afridi wise in Pukhtunwali, came up with the only satisfactory answer. Kabul must die by the hand of his brother, a Naik in the garrison. Then there would be no feud, no reprisals. When it was put to him the Naik consented, for the honour of his family, the Abdur Rahman Khel, the Dré Mahsud, and the Militia, to execute by shooting his own brother.

Communication with the man in the keep had hitherto been confined to shouted insults and occasional shots. Now a dialogue was opened by the Post Subadar and the senior Mahsud officer. Kabul's conscience was clear: Bowring, he said, was sleeping with his feet towards Mecca, 'and therefore I shot him'. But Kabul's exaltation had simmered down. There was no way he could escape death, and he did not particularly want the Abdur Rahman Khel to be feuding with everyone else. He accepted the offer of death with dignity.

The time was fixed for five in the afternoon. The garrison was on parade, each man's eyes fixed on the keep. Half-hidden behind a mud-plastered buttress stood a British officer, two Pathan officers and the executioner, all with rifles. A khaki-clad figure climbed on to the keep parapet, rifle in hand. He stretched himself erect and flung down his rifle among the soldiers gazing up at him. '*Allah ho Akbar*!' he cried, 'God is Great.' The executioner raised his rifle, aimed at the erect figure, and fired. Kabul Khan remained for a moment poised still erect, spun round, and fell with a crash into the courtyard below. A prolonged 'Aah-ah-h!' of relief went up.

Kabul's relatives asked for his body to bury, and that request was granted. It should not have been. They buried Kabul in traditional style, with a recess in the grave for the questioning angel to sit. Above the grave they built a shrine to Mahsud patriotism, lit every Friday by flickering lamps. Here the young men came to pray, and resolved to follow Kabul's example.

Had the Commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel R. Harman, been at Sarwekai, the murderer's body might not have been thus honoured. For he was an expert on Mahsuds, speaking fluently their difficult dialect of Pushtu and knowing very well their courage and black treachery. He took on the duties of Political Agent, as well as his own. But even he under-estimated the persistence and loquacity of Mahsuds, whose most innocent amusement is to plague the Political Agent with interminable complaints and petitions, with strident demands for larger subsidies, for road-making and firewood contracts, for intercession in

blood-feuds generations old, for honorary titles and distinctions, even for campaign medals earned fighting against the Government forces. Therefore a junior political officer, Evelyn Howell, was sent to take over as Political Agent in order that Harman might concentrate on his military duties.

The ascent of 3,000 feet from the Gomal River to Sarwakai by a rough bridlepath was a taxing one for Howell, for his Militia escort and for the mules and camels carrying his luggage. At the top of the rise were the Mahsud Maliks assembled to meet him, 'Hawk-faced, trim-bearded, hard-bitten ruffians but well mannered and very pleasant-spoken'. One of them, with a charming smile, holding Howell's hands fondly in his, said, 'We are so glad a new Political Agent has come, for when there is no Political Agent, we are as orphans.'

They rode on to Wana where Howell was to live with Harman, the Militia second-in-command Captain Plant, a doctor and a Sapper subaltern responsible for the roads. Wana was a fort, loop-holed and crenellated, constructed mainly of dried mud. It consisted of a perimeter-wall with corner-towers, lined with living-quarters, offices and stores, enclosing a yard of about an acre in the centre of which was a two-storeyed keep containing well, treasury, cells and armoury with spare rifles and ammunition. There were few amenities; there was no ice (except that provided in winter by Nature), no electricity, running water, fresh fruit or vegetables. In summer mosquitoes and sand-flies proliferated, afflicting in turn everyone with malaria and sandfly fever; scorpions lurked in the most inconvenient places such as shoes, or under the seat of the thunderbox; myriads of flies commuted busily between latrines, kitchens and dining-rooms, jostled each other along the rim of the tea-cup as it was raised to drink, and were only kept out of the (tinned) milk and (tinned) butter by covering jugs and dishes with little beaded nets. Diarrhoea, dysentery and jaundice were rife.

Four thousand feet above sea-level, Wana fort and its attendant bazaar squatted in the middle of a saucer-like plain surrounded by mountains. Scattered acacias, dwarf-palms, berberis and gurgura bushes relieved the monotony of the grey and khaki landscape but (except during the rains) grass was as scanty as hairs in leprosy. (Waziristan in spring could be delightful. As an English-speaking Political Assistant enthused in later days, 'These green, green grasses, these white, white sheeps, these blue, blue skies ... Sir, it is very decent.') The climate varied from scorching heat to snow and blizzards, and there was generally a wind bringing dust-devils and sand-storms in

season. For the officers there was moderate partridge-, duck- and snipe-shooting, poker and bridge in the evenings, a phonograph with a few scratched records, and a nine-hole golf course where the 'greens' were of hard dry mud and pebbles on the fairways sent the straightest drive or approach bounding off in unexpected directions. *Age-wallahs*, forward-fellows, preceded the players not, as elsewhere in India, to mark the ball, but to ensure that the bunkers harboured no unfriendly persons.

Harman, having no illusions about Mahsuds, instituted a system whereby would-be recruits were subjected to what would now be called 'positive vetting' by the Maliks of their sections and by Mahsud officers. This was resented by the leading Mahsud personality of the time, the Mullah Powindah, Shabi Khel, an aged, reactionary bigot with meagre sacerdotal qualifications and an unlimited capacity for mischief. He received intermittent funds from Kabul or further north which enabled him to keep at his beck-and-call a gang of accomplished cut-throats. He was, in his way, a patriot, but his patriotism consisted of sticking at nothing to preserve the Mahsud way of life. The construction of roads, Harman's positive vetting and, indeed, the very existence of the Militia were all seen by him as threats to Mahsud integrity. In 1904–5 he was at peace with the Government, busy infiltrating into the Militia his own disciples and at the same time warning Harman, in letters too vaguely worded to be of any use, against treachery in the corps.

On a bitter night in January 1905, when snow lay deep on the parade-ground and roofs, the officers assembled for dinner in their Mess which boasted – and in Wana it was something to boast of – glass panes to windows and door. The doctor had gone early to bed, feeling unwell. The others had, of course, changed for dinner, the soldiers into the 'bum-freezer' mess-jackets of their respective regiments, skin-tight overall trousers, starched shirts and collars, and black bow-ties. Howell, the civilian, wore evening dress with, instead of a dinner-jacket, the dark-blue blazer of the Lions, an Emmanuel College dining club. The worse the conditions, the more important it seemed to preserve standards. They sat round the blazing log-fire, playing liar-dice for pegs of whisky and sherry, and then went into the dining-room to tackle the mulligatawny soup, stringy chicken and caramel custard which was the best that could be expected of any cook willing to put up with Wana. To show confidence in their men, all were unarmed.

It being Saturday night, Harman was about to rise and propose 'Mr Vice, the King!', to which Howell would reply, 'Gentlemen, the King-Emperor!', when there was a tinkle of broken glass and Howell,

looking up, saw come through the door a young sepoy in uniform carrying at the port a rifle with bayonet fixed. He halted and stared at Howell; Howell stared back, thinking that he had come from curiosity to see the Sahibs' mysterious tamasha. Then he lowered the muzzle of his rifle, and at that moment Harman and Plant dashed round the table to grapple with him. The others piled in too, and soon the intruder was disarmed and trussed up with his own pagri.

Harman, leaning against the wall, asked, 'Is anyone hurt?'

Howell looked at the others and replied, 'No, are you, Colonel?'

'I think I am,' said Harman, collapsing on his knees to the ground.

A Mess-servant put his head round the door and was sent to fetch the doctor. A Mess Orderly also arrived, and was told to bring an armed guard to take the prisoner to the cells.

The doctor arrived in his dressing-gown, opened Harman's jacket and shirt and examined a bayonet-wound in the left side of his chest. Howell could see from his face that there was no hope.

Harman spoke for the last time. 'They've got me. I knew they would.'

He was carried to his quarters, where he died.

Howell padded off in his evening shoes along the frozen path between piled-up banks of snow back to the Mess, where he wrote a telegram to the Chief Commissioner. As he gave it to a servant to take to the telegraph office, Captain Plant came in.

'The man is a Mahsud,' he said. 'I don't want to force your hand for it's your responsibility. But there is a Mahsud half-company, probably the one to which he belongs, on duty in the keep, and I think they will have to be disarmed.'

'Why?'

'Well, when we reached the big door into the keep and the quarter-guard opened the wicket for us, I saw about a dozen of them standing about, with their rifles and bayonets. It is not a night in which any sane man would loaf about outside when he might be indoors, unless he had some purpose in doing so. I called to them, and when they heard my voice, they all bolted into their barrack. So I stowed my prisoner in the lock-up, warned the quarter-guard and came out.'

The Subadar Major, a grizzled Afridi, then arrived, a rather comic figure in nocturnal deshabillé. 'Is the Colonel Sahib dead?' he asked.

Howell replied that he was. 'A Mahsud killed him. He has been arrested and is in the lock-up. Now what about the Mahsuds in the keep? Do you think they should be disarmed?'

'They should be, but there will be trouble. You should get the Chief Commissioner's sanction.'

'If it is going to be done at all,' retorted Howell, 'it has to be done at once.'

Plant said, 'There are fifty Mahsuds in the keep, and the big door is bolted on the inside. They can overpower the quarter-guard, break open the lock-up, release the prisoner, seize the armoury and treasury without anyone being able to get at them. And there is another full company of Mahsuds in one of the barracks in the outer fort . . . Even if nothing worse happens, when the other classes learn of Harman having been killed by a Mahsud, they will open fire on them. As you know, all the men have their rifles and a hundred rounds at night.'

It was clear that the job had to be done immediately, and the Subadar Major collected as many men as he could from other tribes. They lit several lanterns and walked over to the keep. Howell could not help reflecting that he was somewhat unsuitably dressed. The quarter-guard opened the keep door and they filed through into the empty, silent courtyard. Some men were posted on a roof, others in a line aslant the courtyard, their rifles pointing towards the barrack door. The lanterns were placed to light the doors.

When all was ready, Plant called out, 'Jemadar Salim!' – the Mahsud Jemadar commanding the half-company. There was no reply, so a man was sent to the Jemadar's room which adjoined the barrack. He emerged, looking rather sheepish.

'Go in and tell your men', said Plant, 'that if they obey orders, no harm will come to them. They are to file out and fall in outside the barrack. If they disobey, they will be shot.'

Salim saluted and entered the barrack. There was a confused murmur from inside, but for a long time nothing more happened. Then he emerged, alone.

'They will not listen to me,' he said. 'Perhaps if the Sahibs were to speak to them . . .'

Never did Howell feel so apprehensive as when he advanced through the snow to one door while Plant went to the other. They were in moonlight, the lanterns behind them. In the barrack all was dark and still. Howell became aware of his orderly, who had brought him his revolver, fluttering about him like a hen and then standing so close as almost to shoulder him aside. The orderly, too, was a Mahsud. The Subadar Major and another Pathan officer were with Plant.

'Come out!' they called, and repeated what they had told Salim.

To their enormous relief the doors opened and the men emerged. Under their own Jemadar's orders they fell in, grounded arms, about-turned and took two paces forward. A party detailed for the purpose

scooped up the rifles from the snow and carried them to the armoury with commendable celerity. The Mahsuds were shut in their barracks for the night, guarded by the riflemen on the roof. The crisis was over.

As Plant approached the armoury, the Subadar Major said to him, rather loudly, 'The sentry is a Wazir, and Wazirs at bottom are Mahsuds. He should be changed.'

Plant threw the sentry a casual glance. 'A Wazir? So he is. But that's Barbaz Khan. I'd trust *him* anywhere.'

The sentry threw out his chest and began strutting up and down like a Guardsman.

The Militia practice was for the rifles of all men not actually on duty to be locked in company arms-kots from dawn to dusk. The Mahsuds in Wana and the outposts, about a quarter of the corps, were thus disarmed without drama or disgrace, and sent home on a month's leave from which they did not return.

Howell, the only available magistrate, tried the murderer as dispassionately as he could. The man's name was Shabir Khan, of a Shabi Khel sub-section closely allied to that of the Mullah Powindah. He exulted in what he had done. He had enlisted, he said, with only one aim – to kill all the British officers and 'have a finer song made about me than Kabul'. There could be only one verdict: to be hanged by the neck until dead. He had two requests: for a clean shirt in which to die, and for some collyrium to blacken his eyelids, in the fashion of young Mahsud bucks, so that he would be acceptable to the Houris of Paradise.

But who should hang him? To order any Pathan Militiaman to do this would be trying loyalty too hard. For a civilian 'follower', a sweeper, say, or a shoemaker, to hang the man would be a shame on all Pathans more than they could bear. There was, as in the case of Bowring's murder, only one answer – but a different one. The British officers must carry out the sentence.

The Garrison Engineer constructed the gallows, a beam resting across a corner of the keep courtyard. Shabir Khan, who had spent the previous half-hour smartening himself up, was brought after dark to the place of execution by two Afridi officers. The Engineer positioned the noose round his neck, one British officer pinioned his arms, and two others heaved him over the parapet. It was scarcely what they had joined the Army and the Militia for.

The Subadar Major pronounced Harman's epitaph in a characteristic Pushtu pun: '*Ai ai*! *Armoon, armoon*!* That such a *Bahadur*† should

* *Armoon* means grief.
† *Bahadur* means a hero.

die thus! If this Sahib were to be killed [pointing at Howell] or that Sahib were to be killed [pointing at Plant] the Government could send another. But Harman Sahib! *Ai, Ai! Armoon, armoon!*'

It was not possible to prove the Mullah Powindah's complicity, though afterwards he used to boast that he could send out his Sheikhs to slay whomsoever he wanted slain. 'You cannot see, but I can see, Kabul Khan and Shabir Khan in Paradise, lovingly tended by the Houris thereof, masters of the dainty fruit and sweet streams of Heaven.'

Retribution, Pathan-style, was not long in coming. Four months after Harman's murder, ex-Jemadar Kastor, Abdur Rahman Khel (the same section as Kabul Khan), formerly of the South Waziristan Militia but discharged with the other Mahsuds in February, and two of his brothers, were shot dead by a patrol of militiamen, led by Subadar Mohibullah, Jowaki Afridi, in circumstances which suggested that Mohibullah had set them up. However, the official view was that his conduct was as white as snow, and he was awarded the Indian Order of Merit for it. In November, tit-for-tat, Mahsud ex-militiamen shot dead Captain Donaldson, Brigade Major in Bannu. And so it went on.

The murders of Bowring, Harman and Donaldson by Militia sepoys or ex-sepoys seemed to confirm the worst misgivings of those who believed that the formation of the Waziristan Militias was an act of lunacy. In fact only Mahsuds had been responsible; other tribes, including Wazirs, had behaved perfectly. So it seemed reasonable to suppose that, once they had got rid of the Mahsuds, the two corps would give good service. The events of the next fourteen years seemed to justify this assessment.

Later generations of Scouts would criticise the old Militias for being deployed in 'penny packets'. In 1910 the North Waziristan Militia, for instance, was spread out over eighteen posts, most of which had garrisons of seventy or eighty of whom fifteen or so would be on leave at any one time and at least as many required for post-defence, leaving too few for long patrols in strength. Only the main base at Miranshah could send out a proper striking force. The only outpost which could have a resident British officer was Spinwam. He lived in extreme discomfort in a mud hut, the men in tents protected by drystone walls, sleeping on heaps of straw. The fleas were awful beyond belief.

There were, however, compensations. British Officers were given generous local leave. There was a delightfully simple administration. With as yet no legal code governing the Militias, officers could make the punishment fit the crime. There was no equipment audit. There was no

pay audit. A lump sum was drawn sufficient to pay the corps at its full establishment; if the corps happened to be over-strength, the extra money needed was found by the Political Agent to whom the unspent balance was handed when the corps was understrength. There was virtually no office-work. To emphasise their irregular status, officers wore irregular clothes on all but the most formal occasions. Even on operations the usual costume was a sleeveless shirt in summer, and in winter a tweed coat and cap or slouch hat.

The Militias attracted eccentric characters, British and Pathan. Lieutenant Colonel D. H. McNeile, a cavalryman commanding the North Waziristan Militia, had a passion for playing the violin, rather badly, and designing steam-engines, rather well. The Mounted Infantry of the Militia included in its ranks a Wazir with bright red hair and blue eyes, reputedly the offspring of a Gordon Highlander, whom the officers called Charlie. Tor Khan, a small, tough and wiry Afridi, Jowaki, who rose to be a Subadar Major of the same Militia, had been transferred in a hurry from the Khyber Rifles after committing sacrilege by shooting dead a Mullah who had approached his post, Koran in hand, and called upon the garrison to desert. He was the brother of Subadar Mohibullah of the South Waziristan Militia, also a killer. His nine-year-old son followed the family tradition, on a visit to his uncle Mohibullah, by cutting the throat of a seven-year-old cousin. (This son later became a Subadar of the Tochi Scouts.)

The crack-shot in the North Waziristan Militia was another Afridi, Mohi Khan, an old soldier almost totally devoid of ambition. Or, rather, his only ambition was to be orderly to Captain Bull, the Right Wing Commander. Bull, with an escort of only six sowars, went for a hack one day from Miranshah and ran into a hostile gang. The troops in Miranshah were alerted by riderless horses galloping back, and the Mounted Infantry ran to saddle up. The first sowar to be ready was promptly dispossessed of his horse by Mohi Khan, who galloped off to the rescue of his beloved Bull Sahib. Swept from the saddle by a low-hanging branch, he went on at the double – only to meet Bull's party returning to Miranshah, quite safe and sound.

Miranshah was the only place in Waziristan which offered any sort of comfort. In 1910 it even housed two nursing sisters, come to look after an officer who contracted enteritis. It was to be many a year before Miranshah saw their like again.

In 1914 Major Dodds, a former officer of the North Waziristan Militia, was Political Agent, South Waziristan. He had a personal orderly, Sarfaraz, a young Mahsud who had served with him in the

Militia. A good Pathan orderly was apt to be spoilt by his Sahib. Brave, deft, intelligent and often witty, he got his own way too often. It was a sound rule on the Frontier not to keep an orderly too long. Sarfaraz had been Dodds's orderly four years; and because Dodds ignored his wishes on the distribution of road-construction money, he shot Dodds, two other officers and three police constables with the rifle Dodds had given him.

4

Side-shows, 1914–18

In the late 1890s the British, Australian and New Zealand armies were re-armed with the Lee-Metford rifle, and by 1907 their discarded Martinis, sold to arms dealers, were flooding the market and arriving on the Frontier via the Persian Gulf in very large numbers. Although it is not a magazine-rifle and does not fire smokeless powder, the Martini is a very good weapon, accurate and long-ranged, and the tribes soon developed effective fire-and-movement tactics. When the tribes had been armed mainly with jezails and swords, a column of troops with camels and mules could march safely up a valley if the heights as far as three hundred yards on each side were piqueted: now the piquets had to be set out at least nine hundred yards, the speed of advance was reduced and the difficulties of withdrawal – all Frontier campaigns must end in withdrawal – were vastly increased. It was a much more serious business than it had been in Kipling's and Warburton's day. The Militias had Martini rifles until 1912, when they were rearmed with the long magazine Lee-Enfield.

At the start of the First World War there were about 5,000 trans-Frontier Pathans in the regular Indian Army, including ten companies of Mahsuds. Their performance was patchy. Those who reached the Western Front and East Africa fought magnificently, particularly the Mahsuds, and won numerous medals for bravery; an officer who commanded Mahsuds in East Africa waxed lyrical in their praise. But many deserted rather than fight against the Turks, for the Sultan of Turkey was the Khalif of Islam, Commander of the Faithful, Shadow of God upon Earth. The trans-Frontier Pathans' ambivalence is illus-

trated by two Afridi brothers, Mir Mast and Mir Dast. Mir Mast deserted in France, was awarded the Iron Cross and sent back with a Turkish mission to the Tirah where he made much mischief. Mir Dast was awarded the Victoria Cross in France and never wavered in his loyalty.

Fortunately the Amir of Afghanistan did not take advantage of our difficulties by proclaiming the Jehad (Holy War). Even without this, Waziristan from 1914 to 1918 was far from peaceful.

On 7 January 1915, Captain Eustace Jotham of the North Waziristan Militia and a dozen Mounted Infantry rode out from Miranshah to locate raiders from Khost, in Afghanistan. Jotham was a romantic; recently on leave he had won newspaper fame by rescuing passengers from a blazing railway-carriage and now he was furious at being stuck in a mud hut in Waziristan while his battalion would soon be fighting Turks or Germans. At Spina Khaisora, fifteen miles west of Miranshah, he and his small patrol were ambushed in a deep nullah and almost surrounded by some 1,500 tribesmen. Jotham and his men galloped for safety, but just as he was getting clear, the horse of one of his sowars was shot. Jotham turned back to rescue him. He was quixotically carrying a sword, with which he is said to have cut down several of the Khostwals before he fell himself, riddled with bullets and bleeding from a dozen slashes. At almost the same time his Daffadar, a Wazir named Darim Khan, dismounted to give covering fire to the remainder of the patrol, and remounted and made off only when they had got safely away. Jotham was awarded a posthumous VC. Darim received the Indian Order of Merit and, subsequently, the Croix de Guerre. He lived to become one of the Frontier's most famous characters.

Two weeks later another Khostwal lashkar, estimated at 10,000, again advanced on Miranshah. Under their Commandant, Major G. B. Scott, the North Waziristan Militia and a section of Mountain Artillery made a long night march to get across the lashkar's line of retreat, and a regular brigade from Bannu attacked frontally at dawn. The enemy were driven back on to the Militia and across the Durand Line, with heavy casualties. After this the Khostwals and local tribesmen gave no more trouble for four years.

In South Waziristan the Mahsuds were more than troublesome. The anti-Government party led by Fazal Din, son of the Mullah Powindah, was spoiling for a fight, and in 1914 committed several outrages. The Government was exasperated, for the last thing it wanted then was a frontier campaign; but in 1915 the Mahsuds committed one hundred

and eighty major crimes which claimed a hundred victims dead, seventy wounded and ninety-three Hindus kidnapped. In November a piquet of the South Waziristan Militia was ambushed, ten were killed, three wounded and thirteen rifles lost. In April 1916, there were no less than seventeen Mahsud raids into Dera Ismail Khan district.

At the end of February, 1917, Mahsuds attacked the Militia post at Sarwekai, garrisoned by 250 men under Major Hughes. Plagued by long-range sniping from Garesi Sar, a hill commanding the post from about 1,400 yards, Hughes sent a hundred men to occupy it. There was no difficulty in putting them there, but great difficulty in keeping them supplied. So Hughes reluctantly decided to withdraw them and took out fifty rifles half-way to Garesi Sar to cover the withdrawal. The Mahsuds were, as always, quick to seize their opportunity: both the covering party and the withdrawing party were rushed, and attacked with bayonets and knives. Hughes and twenty of the men were killed, ten wounded, eleven captured and reserved for a more unpleasant end at the hands of the Mahsud women. The situation was saved only by the courage and skill of Subadar Mohibullah, IOM, the Mahsud-hating Afridi, who withdrew the survivors into the fort and held it until relieved.

In April and May 1917 the total Mahsud bag, nearly all regular army, was 207 killed, 140 wounded and, most disgraceful, 238 rifles captured.

On 10 May a force from Sarwekai moved out at night to intercept raiders. It consisted of 250 Gurkhas and 120 Militia under Mohibullah again. At dawn with fifty Gurkhas and fifty Militia he surprised and shot up a party of Mahsuds cooking their breakfast. The Mahsuds were caught off their guard – no ordinary occurrence – but counter-attacked with extraordinary ferocity. There were four or five hundred of them, all armed with magazine rifles, and the troops were forced back to Sarwekai, losing thirty-nine killed (including two British officers), sixty-three wounded and seventy missing.

At the end of the month a well-known hostile named Musa Khan carried out an astonishing coup. He led by night, right up into the Tochi Valley, a gang of Abdullai, real hard-liners. Their objective was the North Waziristan Militia post at Tut Narai. Because the post was well outside Mahsud country, the garrison had become careless. Briefed by ex-Militia men, Musa Khan timed the attack for a holiday, knowing that everyone but the Quarter Guard would be off duty, their rifles locked in the Armoury, the men washing their clothes or bathing in the pool below the post. No patrols would be out who might discover the gang hiding in nullahs and holly-oak jungle close by.

In mid-morning five apparently unarmed tribesmen and two 'women' stopped to talk to the Militiamen hanging about outside the wire. It is likely that the 'women' were taken for dancing boys, dressed as girls, favourite entertainers on the Frontier. Three of the men then approached the sentry and chatted him up. A gullible simpleton, he was persuaded to buy them some sweets from the post canteen. As he turned to oblige them, the three Mahsuds at his heels, a more alert sentry on the wall shouted a warning. Too late! The Mahsuds produced revolvers and one shot dead the foolish sentry; two of them then made for the gate, shooting the Guard Commander as he tried to shut it, and firing on the remainder of the Guard. The rest of the party, including the 'girls', also brought out hidden weapons and engaged the sentry on the wall as thirty more tribesmen rushed up from the scrub-covered nullah. They burst in and shut the remainder of the garrison, who could not get at their rifles, in the barrack-rooms. Only the Post Subadar, seizing a dead sentry's rifle, made any sort of fight, but he was badly wounded. Then it was all over. The telegraphist just managed to get off a signal – 'Please help raiders are plundering' – before being knifed. The Abdullai got away with fifty-nine rifles and thousands of rounds of ammunition.

Worse, if anything could be worse, happened in June 1917 at the South Waziristan Militia post of Tiarza, garrisoned by twenty-five sepoys under a Wazir Havildar. A relation of the Havildar's who 'just happened' to be passing with pack-bullocks was invited in for tea. While he was refreshing himself, the Havildar sent out the entire garrison, except for an Afridi sentry, to collect firewood. As soon as they had gone, the Havildar and his relation overpowered the sentry, loaded on to the bullocks twenty-five rifles and thirteen boxes of ammunition, and departed.

In 1919, when the British and Indian armies were war-weary and demobilising as fast as possible, a new Amir Amanullah of Afghanistan did declare a Jehad and sent regular Afghan troops across the Durand Line.

5

The Third Afghan War, 1919

The main Afghan attack was a thrust into the Khyber. The Khyber Rifles should have borne the brunt of this, but their loyalty had been undermined by the Mullahs summoning all Moslems to the Holy War, by revolutionary propaganda from India, and by the rumour that the Government intended to destroy the flower of the Afridi nation by putting the Khyber Rifles into the forefront of the battle and decimating them with artillery. After a number of desertions, the Army took over all the Khyber posts, and the Khyber Rifles were offered the choice of discharge or serving on. Those who opted for discharge numbered 1,180 (but no Pathan officers), which was at least preferable to their deserting with rifles. Of the loyalists, 146 were transferred to a Military Police Battalion, and 200 were formed into the Khyber Levy Corps, un-uniformed and armed with their own rifles. That, for a quarter-century, was the end of the Khyber Rifles.

In the far north, in the semi-independent state of Chitral, ruled by its Mehtar (prince) Shuja-ul-Mulk, the Government and allied forces consisted of the 1/11th Rajputs (450 rifles); 23 Mountain Battery; one section Sappers and Miners; the Chitral Scouts (1,000 rifles); the Mehtar's Bodyguard, about 2,000 men of whom 150 had Martini rifles and the remainder muzzle-loading rifles and jezails; and a Russian machine-gun brought across the Pamirs by a refugee White Russian colonel. The Chitral Scouts were part-time soldiers, called up for one month's training every year, commanded by the Assistant Political Agent, Major Reilly. There were also a considerable number of Kafir volunteers whose country, adjacent to Chitral, had been conquered by

the Afghans in 1897, its idol-worshipping people offered the choice between conversion to Islam and instant decapitation, and its chiefs taken off to slavery in Kabul. The wildest of the wild, and totally undisciplined, they were hardy, war-like and longing for revenge.

Opposing these forces, at cantonments in Birkot and Arnawai in the Kunar valley,* were six Afghan infantry battalions with five more on the way, four machine-guns and twelve mountain guns. The odds seemed rather heavy, but the Mehtar rejected with scorn the Amir's invitation to join the Holy War, and his people, despising Afghans, followed his lead.

Lieutenant-Colonel F. C. S. Sambourne-Palmer, commanding the Rajputs, assumed command of all the local forces. Reilly's command consisted of the Scouts, the Bodyguard under the Mehtar's son, Prince Nasr-ul-Mulk, and the Kafirs – as strange a force as was ever led by a British officer in the twentieth century.

On 5 May 1919, Major Reilly, on his own responsibility, mobilised the Scouts, and in the next two weeks they drove back two Afghan incursions. It was a satisfactory introduction to war for the Scouts, who suffered no casualties and claimed to have killed and wounded scores of Afghans.

Against an enemy less formidable than Mahsuds and Wazirs, it was permissible to take risks. Leaving himself with no reserve nearer than Chitral town, Sambourne-Palmer divided his small force into four columns for an attack on the Afghan positions at Birkot and Arnawai. Prince Nasr-ul-Mulk's Right Column consisted of a company of Scouts, 1,000 of the Bodyguard and some Kafirs. The Right Bank column consisted of two Scout companies. The main body, known as the Mobile Column, under Sambourne-Palmer himself, consisted of two Scout companies under Reilly, the Rajputs less one company, the two mountain guns and the Sappers. The Left Column consisted of three companies of Scouts.

The plan for the attack was that the Right Bank column would seize the bridge over the Bashgul near its junction with the Kunar, and attack Birkot. The Mobile column would move down the left bank and attack Arnawai, which would be outflanked by the Left Column moving through the mountains. To Nasr-ul-Mulk's Right Column was allotted the most spectacular role: guided by Kafirs, it would cross the frontier by the high Patuk pass west of Mirkhanni; drop down into the valley of the Istor river; follow that river to its junction with the Bashgul; cross

* The Chitral river is known below its junction with the Bashgul as the Kunar river. For simplicity it will be referred to as the Kunar throughout.

the Bashgul by a rope-bridge; and outflank the enemy's position by seizing the heights west of Birkot. Three hundred Chitrali jezailchis would move along the watershed between the Istor and the Kunar rivers, acting as connecting link between Nasr-ul-Mulk and the two central columns. (See Map 1.)

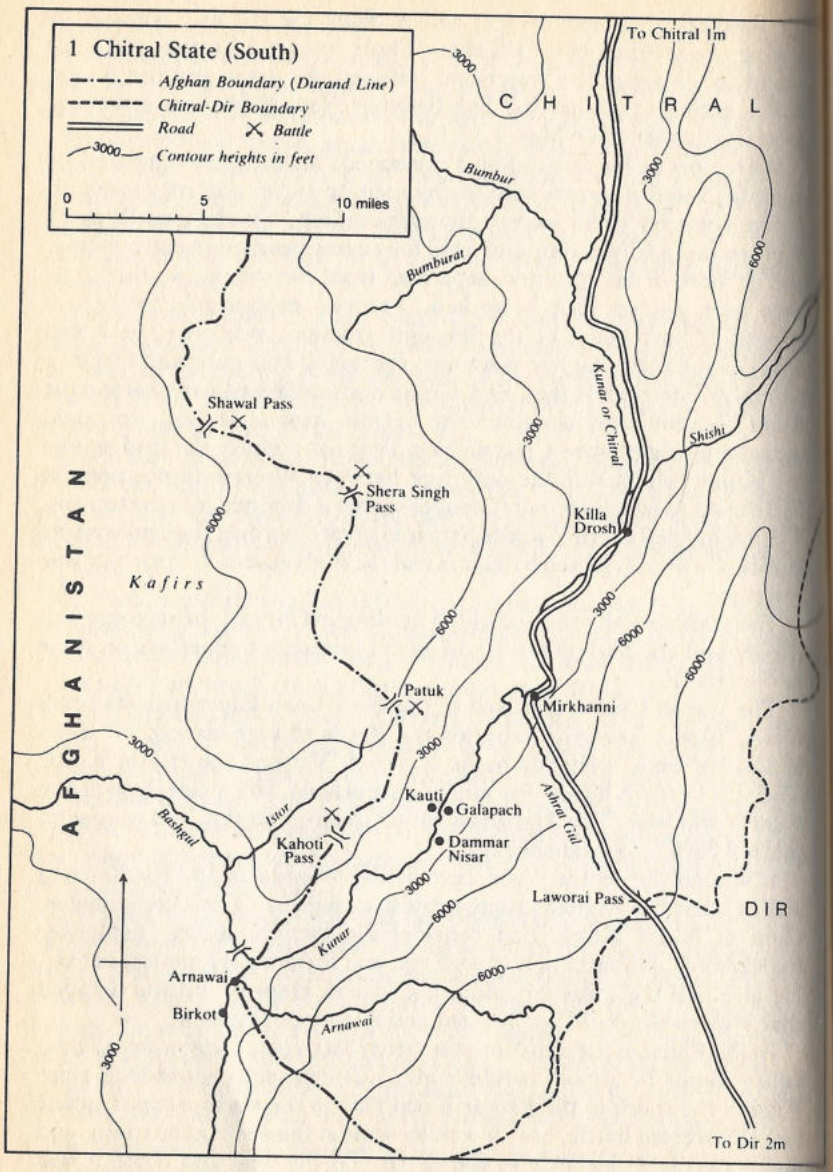
With most of his army almost untrained, his columns separated by mountains and a torrent swollen by melting snow, and no communication between them except thought-reading, Sambourne-Palmer's plan seemed a trifle ambitious. Had the enemy been more enterprising, one or more of his columns, separated from the others, would surely have been cut up. But it worked. The two central columns struck opposition just north of the Bashgul junction, pushed it back and attacked the main Afghan positions, capturing four guns and fifty-five prisoners. Meanwhile the Left Column had outflanked Arnawai and the Right Column duly occupied the heights west of Birkot. For good measure a single brave Chitrali crept down at night to the bridge over the Kunar which was the only link between the enemy positions at Birkot and Arnawai and cut the ropes so that it dropped into the torrent. The enemy fled south towards Asmar in great disorder; the cantonment at Birkot was well looted by Kafirs and the bodyguard. The victory was complete.

That was virtually the end of the fighting in Chitral: the regulars, the Scouts and the Bodyguard could all congratulate themselves on their performance.

The war in Chitral smacked of the Boys' Own Paper with its small forces, jezails, savage auxiliaries and deeds of high daring, all overlooked by the stupendous peaks of Tirich Mir and the Hindu Kush. The war in the Khyber was more conventional, like a sideshow of the First World War. The Afghans were not much good at it, and were soon pushed back into Afghanistan.

It was on the central front, comprising Waziristan and the Kurram Valley, that the Afghans came nearest to success. Their commander, General Nadir Khan, had considerable tactical ability, deploying fourteen regular battalions against six, and forty-eight guns against six. He also had the initiative, since the Indian High Command decided that Waziristan could not be held and must be evacuated.

In the Kurram the situation was rather different. Geographically the valley might be almost indefensible: a salient, sixty miles long from Thal in the south to the Peiwar Kotal Pass in the north, shaped rather like an inverted bottle, only five miles wide at the neck in the south, and about twenty miles wide in the north. To the west and north it was



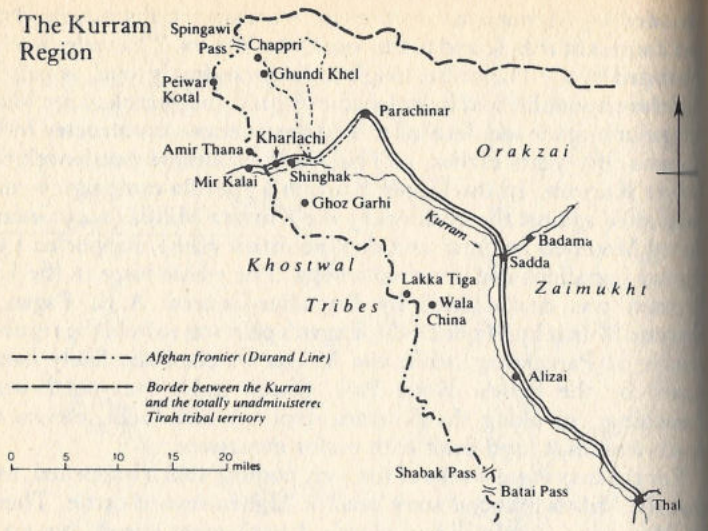
bounded by Afghanistan; to the east were potentially hostile Orakzai and Zaimukht tribes; and to the south, the Wazirs. The valley itself was inhabited by the Turi tribe, tough and outstandingly loyal, which made its defence possible and its evacuation highly undesirable. (See Map 2.) A regular brigade was detailed to hold the defences, constructed by Lord Roberts fifty years earlier, at Thal, in the southern bottleneck of the Lower Kurram. In the Upper Kurram a guerilla campaign would be conducted against the invaders by the Kurram Militia (1,450 infantry, eighty Mounted Infantry and two mountain guns), supported by two regular battalions and attached troops. The whole force in the Upper Kurram was commanded by Brigadier-General A. E. Fagan, the Kurram Militia by Major Dodd. Fagan's plan was to hold the regulars in reserve at Parachinar, while the Militia watched the likely invasion routes by the Peiwar Kotal Pass, fifteen miles west-north-west of Parachinar, or along the Kurram river via Kharlachi, eleven miles south-west of it; and dealt with minor incursions.

For the first three weeks of the war, nothing much happened, except that the Militia grabbed sixty head of Afghan-owned cattle. Then, on 22 May 1919, Nadir Khan marched with great speed, his artillery conveyed by elephants which have good cross-country mobility, and invested Thal. Fortunately his tactical ability was not backed by war-experience, and he contended himself with shelling the defences without putting in a serious infantry attack. The garrison had four unpleasant days before the arrival on 1 June of a relief column from Kohat. Next day Nadir Khan's army withdrew to the west. Meanwhile in the Upper Kurram the Militia were having great success. In the last week of May it drove back an incursion near the Peiwar Kotal Pass and an attack on Kharlachi Post.

The next Afghan move was to try to divide Upper from Lower Kurram by cutting through the valley via Lakka Tiga and joining forces with the Orakzais and Zaimukhts. The enemy numbered some 3,000 men with five guns. It was, therefore, bold of Lieutenant Beamish, who commanded at Lakka Tiga, to attack them with only two hundred infantry and eighty Mounted Infantry. However, this he did, on a front of no less than four miles. Although he did not decisively defeat them, he frustrated their purpose.

On 29 May an Orakzai lashkar came down from the mountains to attack the militia post of Badama. Badama was commanded by Subadar Gul Khan, who with one hundred rifles of the Militia and a lashkar of Turi villagers, waded into the Orakzais and drove them out of the valley with the loss of twenty dead.

2 The Kurram Region



On 3 June the Kurram Militia invaded Afghanistan. Major Dodd took one hundred infantry and fifty Mounted Infantry of the Militia, one company of the Guides, two troops of Lancers, and two mountain guns to attack the forward Afghan post at Amir Thana. They moved out from Parachinar in the evening, and achieved complete surprise at dawn. Under cover of fire from the mountain guns, the infantry of the Militia made a valiant attempt to scale the walls. In this they were unsuccessful, but an hour later the garrison surrendered and Amir Thana fort was burnt. The cavalry and Mounted Infantry then trotted on to Mir Zaman Kalai, rushed the village and burnt it as well. They then proceeded towards Mir Kalai, headquarters of the Afghan General in those parts, who hastily decamped. Two Afghan forts and six villages were burnt, at a cost of two Militia killed and five wounded.

The Kurram Militia's last action of the war was on 30 July, nearly eight weeks after the armistice. A combined lashkar of Orakzais and Zaimukhts was again threatening Badama post. Four planes were sent to locate them, one of which flew too close to a steep, wooded mountain-side and was shot down by the tribesmen's rifle-fire, the pilot and observer being wounded. There was a dramatic race for the plane between the tribesmen and the garrison which the garrison just won, rescuing pilot and observer and returning next day to salvage the engine.

On 8 August peace was signed to end the war in which the Kurram Militia had held its own valley, harried the enemy and behaved exactly in the manner expected of it.

The Waziristan Militias had always been told that if they were attacked by regular troops and artillery which could pound their mud forts to rubble, the Army would come to their help. But now there were no troops to spare for Waziristan, so the North Waziristan Militia was ordered to pull out of all its forward posts. The decision may have been militarily correct, but politically it was disastrous, and most Militia officers thought it was wrong. The sight of the Militia burning their stores and marching out of their posts seemed clear evidence that the Sarkar was on the run, and that within a few weeks the whole country of the Pathans down to the Indus would be governed from Kabul.

On 25 May 1919, at the news that Nadir Khan was advancing down the Kaitu valley, the evacuation was ordered of the Militia posts in the Upper Tochi – Datta Khel, Tut Narai, Spina Khaisora and Boya – to Dardoni. After a fight with Wazirs during the night of 25–6 May, the retreating column reached Dardoni early in the morning of 26 May, less about one hundred and fifty Wazirs and Afridis of the Militia who had taken advantage of the darkness to desert. Also on 25 May the garrisons of Shewa and Spinwam were withdrawn in a very difficult rearguard action across open country. They had hardly left the burning fort of Spinwam when Afghans and Wazirs were in it, only three hundred yards behind them; and they were harried by Wazirs all the way back to Idak.

Thousands of exultant Wazirs milled round Dardoni, Miranshah and Idak without closely investing them. The situation was most serious in Miranshah, crammed with dejected or subversive Militia including six hundred Wazirs. At first their attitude had been satisfactory: they had welcomed the outbreak of war because they would then receive Army rations, free, instead of rations on payment; and their Pathan officers brought to the Commandant letters that had been sent to them from Khost urging them to desert with their men and join the Holy War. But they were shaken by the incidents of the last few days and the fact that most of their tribe was now at war with the Sarkar. To support the loyal elements in the garrison, two companies of the 1/41st Dogras, brave, dependable little hill Rajputs from the eastern Punjab, were sent to Miranshah on 26 May.

On 27 May after a day of indecision, nearly all the Wazirs decided to join the Jehad. Their ringleaders were the Jemadar Adjutant, Tarin, a

Tori Khel Wazir, and Subadar Pak, Madda Khel, IOM, Croix d
Guerre. They did not attack the officers and an Orakzai platoon form
a cordon round the Officers' Mess to protect it. A further company
Dogras arrived with a machine-gun, and an attempt was made
persuade the Wazirs at least to hand their rifles into the armoury. Th
started to do so, but when some of the Dogras – disposed in comman
ing positions on the wall and over the gateway – began jeering, no mo
rifles were handed in.

Through the stifling heat of the day there was a stalemate. Th
Khattaks in the garrison remained loyal; the Dogras held the walls an
gates, the Wazirs could not get out. But it was impossible to separate th
loyal Khattaks from the disloyal Wazirs and the Afridis and Orakzais o
doubtful loyalty; only eleven Wazirs, including Darim Khan, IOM
and Zeri Gul, who later became a Subadar in the Tochi Scouts, refuse
to join the mutiny. Lest they be shot either by their fellow-tribesmen o
by the Dogras, they stayed quietly in their barrack-room. Britis
officers were helpless spectators of their world crumbling beneath
them, but neither hand nor voice was raised against them. Whe
darkness fell the mutineers dug a hole through the mud wall an
departed, with their rifles.

Of the much-decorated Subadar Pak no more was heard, bu
Jemadar Tarin became a well-known hostile. An ex-signaller, he used
to amuse himself by tapping the telephone wires between posts and
interrupting official conversations with unseemly observations and
lewd laughter. He met his end in a pistol-duel with a Medical Officer
equally quick on the draw, they shot each other dead.

With the departure of the Wazirs, the situation improved and
discipline was restored. In the circumstances the most surprising thing
was not the desertion of Wazirs and Afridis, but the steadfastness of the
other tribes. The hostile lashkars remained in the vicinity of Dardoni,
Miranshah, and Idak, burnt the Miranshah civil serai, amused them-
selves with a lot of sniping and waited for what they thought was the
inevitable evacuation. However, on 1 June two hundred and fifty of the
Militia garrison in Dardoni made a successful sortie, put the enemy to
flight with a loss of about ninety and blew up some fortified towers from
which Miranshah was being sniped at. Morale improved; the tribesmen
began to feel that the Sarkar was not on the run after all, an impression
which was confirmed by the arrival at Dardoni of a relief column from
Bannu on 4 June.

The South Waziristan Militia consisted of eight British officers, thirty-

seven Pathan officers and 1,800 other ranks, including 230 Wazirs and
480 Afridis. The headquarters were in Wana and it also held six small
posts. Its Commandant was Major G. H. Russell, 126th Baluchis, an
officer very experienced with Pathans, very much in accord with them.
He was thorough and meticulous over matters which he thought
important, especially tactical training, the duties of sentries and
musketry, but more easy-going in turn-out and discipline for what was
his *irregular* corps. With the end of the First World War, officers who
had been with the Militia for three or four years had departed on leave,
and of Russell's five British officers now present (two being on leave)
only two, Captain Traill and Lieutenant Barker, spoke Pushtu and had
been with the Militia long enough to know the men. This was a great
weakness.

On 21 May 1919 Russell heard that an Afghan brigade, with artillery,
had crossed the Durand Line and were within twenty-five miles of
Wana. Four days later news of the evacuation of the Upper Tochi posts
came like a bolt from the blue. The Political Agent, after consulting
higher authority, ordered that the South Waziristan Militia posts be
evacuated before the Mahsuds attacked. The evening of 26 May was
fixed for the start of this operation of extreme difficulty and danger.
The garrisons of the two easterly posts, Nili Kach and Sarwekai, would
withdraw direct to Murtaza, those of Wana and the four westerly posts,
Kharab Kot, Tanai, Khajuri Kach and Toi Khula, would withdraw to
the Zhob Militia post at Mogul Kot and from there to Fort Sandeman.

At six o'clock in the evening of the 26th, Captain Traill with
Lieutenants Hunt and Barker left with sixty infantry and ten Mounted
Infantry ostensibly on a routine patrol but really to pick up the
garrisons of Kharab Kot, Tanai and Khajuri Kach. At seven, Russell
assembled the Pathan officers, explained the situation and gave orders
for the withdrawal. Men from the cis-Frontier tribes would be put on
guard at the gate; 60,000 rupees would be loaded on to camels and
donkeys, the remaining treasure distributed among the men, twenty-
five rupees to every sepoy and twenty rupees to every follower. Spare
arms and ammunition would be destroyed. One hour before midnight
they would march out. The sick must keep up as best they could. The
Pathan officers were surprised at the decision, which at the end of a
victorious war seemed against the laws of Nature; but they did not
question the necessity.

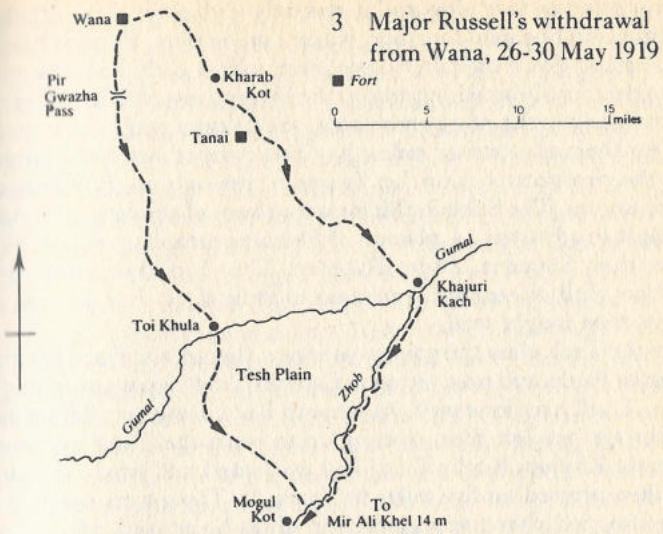
Major Russell's plan was never implemented. At nine o'clock
Subadar Major Maqan Khan, a stout-hearted Bhitanni, rushed into
Russell's office to say that seven Wazir and Afridi officers, with their

platoons, instigated by Subadar Mir Zaman, Malik Din Khel Afridi, who later became a captain in the Afghan army, had seized the central keep of the fort and now held the well, rations, cash, spare arms and ammunition, and donkeys. Russell and Maqan Khan went out to try to reason with them, but they were obdurate, and fired a few shots, not to kill but close enough to make their point. The evacuation plan had to be abandoned. All that could now be done was get out of Wana the loyal elements of the Militia, the British officers and non-combatants, including Khan Bahadur Mohamad Yar Khan of the Political Department. Besides Russell, the British officers were Captain Burn-Murdoch and Lieutenant Leese of the Militia, Major Owen, the Medical Officer, and Lieutenant MacCorstie, the Garrison Engineer.

While the mosquitoes droned round and the mutineers jeered from the keep, the officers packed what they could carry in their haversacks – photographs of parents and girl-friends, a clean shirt and socks, a few items from the Mess larder. They checked that the men going with them had collected any food not in the keep. With the well in the mutineers' hands, most of their water-bottles were empty, a serious matter in the middle of the hot weather when even the night was like a furnace. Then they killed time until the temperature dropped a degree or two and it was time to leave.

At ten o'clock the gate was opened and the column filed out; there were about 290 of the Militia, including a few Mounted Infantry, but a hundred of these were recruits with very little training. The 150 followers included clerks, sweepers, water-carriers without water to carry, tailors, cobblers, washermen, shopkeepers and other followers. There were eight camels, unladen but sure to be needed to carry the wounded. A few derisive shots mocked them as they set off for Mogul Kot, thirty-four miles away across country swarming with enemies. (See Map 3.)

Sweating from the climb in the close, oppressive air, they paused to give the followers a short rest on a col of the Pir Gwazha. The British officers' thoughts were particularly gloomy: the unthinkable was happening, the Empire in humiliating retreat and they were part of it. Looking back at Wana which, if not exactly the jewel of the Orient, had been in a sense their home, they saw it illuminated by lamps and bonfires, and knew that the men they had liked and trusted, playing games with them and fighting side by side, were now ransacking their rooms, pawing over letters and photographs, smashing fishing-rods, golf-clubs and tennis-rackets. Through the gates poured excited tribesmen, milling about the parade-ground, cramming their purses



3 Major Russell's withdrawal from Wana, 26-30 May 1919

and haversacks with silver rupees, stuffing ammunition into their cartridge-belts and trying out their new rifles with *feux de joie* at the stars. There had been nothing like this since the Indian Mutiny.

A quick check among the Militia and followers showed that nearly all the Afridis had disappeared into the night. Major Russell ordered a move, and with the British and Pathan officers restraining the pace of the soldiers and goading on the civilians, they made twenty miles that night, reaching the vicinity of Toi Khula post just before dawn. Russell intended to evacuate the post, garrisoned mainly by Wazirs, and take with him any who were loyal. But the news from Wana had overtaken them during the night: as the head of the column rounded a bend of the nullah and came within sight of Toi Khula, it was fired on from the walls and from the hills to the east.

With his long tail of followers and recruits, Russell had no option but to by-pass Toi Khula. The Wazirs had wasted no time and the sniping from the hillsides was increasing. Major Owen was tending the wounded and tying them as well as he could to the camels' pack-saddles. They stopped to drink and fill their bottles from the warm trickle of the Gumal, and then breasted the steep rise to the Tesh plateau. Fourteen miles to Mogul Kot.

Progress was very slow and it was only with great difficulty that the column could be held together. Russell on his good English-bred pony rode up and down the faltering column, joking with the brave, encouraging the faint-hearted, urging on the limping laggards in the rear. Had it not been for the non-combatants, the column could have raced on, but for them the twenty miles they had covered had been purgatory and the prospect of a further fourteen was only slightly better than Wazir knives. The Subadar Major was a tower of strength, setting a fine example in adversity. A platoon of Sheranis turned up out of the blue under their Subadar, Abdur Rahman. They had deserted from Wana but now, full of remorse, returned to their duty. For the rest of the retreat they fought well.

On the Tesh plain the going was easier, though the Wazirs continued to harass flanks and rear. At noon Captain Traill's party caught up with them. Traill had done well. At Kharab Kot Lieutenant Barker and his ten sowars had left him, trotting on to warn the Tanai garrison and evacuate Khajuri Kach. Traill had evacuated and fired Kharab Kot, and then pressed on five miles to Tanai. In Tanai were seven Wazirs; three dropped over the wall and ran off as he arrived, and the others were locked in the cells. By half-past two in the morning they had loaded on to the post's camels the spare rifles, cash and ammunition and set off for Toi Khula twelve miles away.

They arrived there not long after Russell had left and, like his party, were fired at. Supposing that the garrison had mistaken them for hostiles, Jemadar Taza Gul, Adam Khel Afridi, went up to the post to ask what the hell they were up to. When he demanded to be let in, the post commander replied with some cock-and-bull story of the gate-key being lost. How Taza Gul gained entry is not known; once in, by sheer force of personality he put under arrest eighteen Wazirs in the garrison, opened the gate and let Traill's party in. As there was no fuel to burn the spare rifles and ammunition, the rifles were smashed, the ammunition dumped in the well and the party hurried on towards the Tesh plateau, reinforced by the Toi Khula loyalists.

So intense was the sniping during the afternoon that Russell's column had been obliged to piquet their route to keep the enemy at a distance. As the trained sepoys, less than two hundred, were too few to provide piquets, advance guard and rearguard, Traill's party was very welcome. The advance guard came down off the heights of the Zhob river valley at about six in the evening, and some sowars of the Mounted Infantry were sent on ahead to Mogul Kot to ask for help. For the last two or three miles their route was piqueted by the Zhob Militia.

Barker meanwhile, having left Traill at Kharab Kot, had trotted on to Tanai to Khajuri Kach, forty-seven miles from Wana (a long ride in the hot weather) arriving there in the afternoon. He no longer had ten sowars with him – four Adam Khel Afridis had slipped away during the night. Khajuri Kach was held by 120 rifles, Orakzai and Bangash. They obeyed Barker's orders to burn the stock of forage in the post, foul the well with oil, and load rifles, ammunition and cash on to the post camels, although they seemed sulky and reluctant. He rode out of the fort on his last lap, his six sowars leading, the post garrison following with the camels. As they emerged, they were heavily fired on and the camels, already terrified by the flames and billowing smoke of the burning forage, broke free and galloped down the Gumal river, bucking and shedding rifles, ammunition boxes and cash. Seeing that the Orakzais and Bangash had no intention of following him, and that the camels could not possibly be caught, Barker and his faithful six trotted on up the Zhob river. The tribesmen were too busy chasing the camels to molest them and, free of encumbrances and of doubtful comrades, they felt quite gay and light-hearted, despite the seventy miles they had ridden since the previous evening. They joined Major Russell's column a mile or two short of Mogul Kot.

Mogul Kot was held by twenty-seven Mounted Infantry and eighteen infantry of the Zhob Militia, under a Brahui Jemadar. It seemed as though their troubles were over. But this impression was erroneous. The food and forage in the post was quite inadequate for the influx from Wana; Russell reckoned there was enough for only two days. The water-tank within the walls was designed for fifty men, not 450; attempts to bring water from the river cost eight men wounded and the bullocks pulling the water-cart killed. There was no room for the camels and horses inside the walls, and outside they were picked off by snipers. The little fort was packed to suffocation; the heat, dust and flies were appalling, as was the sanitary problem.

Russell would have liked to push on next day, 28 May; but the followers were exhausted and could not move before the morning of the 30th. Arrangements were made by wireless for one hundred infantry and one hundred Mounted Infantry of the Zhob Militia to leave the next fort, Mir Ali Khel, fourteen miles away, at three o'clock in the morning and piquet half-way to Mogul Kot. Russell's column would move out at six-thirty. The wireless set then broke down, so there was no further communication.

By six-thirty there was no sign of the Zhob Militia who, under Captain A. F. Reilly, were having to fight their way through hardening

opposition. Major Russell set fire to the magazine and stores and
eight o'clock ordered the gate to be opened; but in the face of heavy fi
it had to be slammed shut again. With crow-bar, pick and shovel, a hol
was hacked in the wall at the back of the fort, out of which Lieutenan
Barker and his Mounted Infantry sowars led the fourteen surviving
horses. Under fire they galloped up the river valley looking for
fall-back position, giving a good field of fire and cover for the led horse
They had ridden a mile before they found one. There they dismounted
three horse-holders took the horses into a nullah, and the remainde
prepared to give covering fire to the infantry.

It was some time before these appeared. The first piquet went too fa
ignored signals to return, and seemed to be making off. At thi
inauspicious sight morale, already strained to breaking-point, broke
Nor did it help that this was the first day of the Ramzan fast when
religious feeling might be strong and confidence in Faranghi officers
low. (Nevertheless at no time did they turn on their British officers, and
Barker recalls that throughout mutineers and deserters 'treated us
pretty decently'.)

It was impossible to get any piqueting organised. By twos and threes
and whole sections the men straggled away, some up the wide Zhob
river valley, others into the hills. British and Pathan officers tried to get
them under control, but as soon as they rallied one party and went on to
the next, the first party drifted away. By the time they reached the
Mounted Infantry, who were giving what covering fire they could,
Burn-Murdoch, Traill, Leese, McCorstie, Mohamad Yar Khan and
eight Pathan officers had been killed, Hunt wounded. Then Russell was
shot through both legs, and his pony in the stifle and jaw, but kept
going.

They straggled past the Mounted Infantry who thereafter acted ('in
theory', said Barker years later) as rearguard, dismounting to give
covering-fire and then trotting on to catch up. As they distanced
themselves from Mogul Kot, the Wazirs turned their attention to
looting the fort. About five miles further on the disorderly mob met the
first piquet of the Zhob Militia, whose commander, Captain Reilly, had
been killed as he lay pinned under his wounded horse. They reached
Mir Ali Khel, and in a stupor of exhaustion went on through the night
to Fort Sandeman.

About 350 of the South Waziristan Militia, including a hundred
recruits, had left Mogul Kot; about 140 reached Fort Sandeman.
There is some doubt about how many rifles were lost. The Official
History said that 'very few' retained their rifles; a contemporary, and

somewhat inaccurate, account, written apparently by a clerk whose
command of English was poor, says that only nine arrived with rifles.
But Barker, when shown these figures, said, 'No, I cannot credit that.
We would not have taken them back,' that is, no man would have been
retained in the corps if he had thrown away his rifle, and most of the
men who reached the end of the long march were retained. It does,
therefore, seem probable that of those who got to Fort Sandeman,
comparatively few disgraced themselves by arriving unarmed.

Some of the stragglers from Mogul Kot and Khajuri Kach made
their way in small parties through the hills to Murtaza. The garrisons of
Mili Kach and Sarwekai had been withdrawn without trouble. But of
the Militia's total strength of 1,800 perhaps a hundred were killed and
1,100, nearly all Wazirs and Afridis, deserted with their rifles. The
tribes won 1,200 good Lee-Enfield rifles and 700,000 rounds of ammu-
nition.

The Official History concludes the dismal tale:

> Regarded merely as a feat of endurance at this period of the year, the withdrawal of the party was of itself a fine achievement; but taking into consideration the almost insurmountable difficulties which beset it on the road and the dangers through which it emerged, the exploits stand out as one of the finest recorded in the history of the Indian Frontier.

Well, yes. But one wonders if that is how Major Russell saw it.
However for their personal conduct he was awarded the DSO, Lieuten-
ant Barker the MC, Subadar Major Maqan Khan the IOM and Jemadar
Taza Gul, the IDSM. Taza Gul's exploit at Toi Kullah was very
remarkable, for Afridis did not distinguish themselves at that time.

Harrying the demoralised survivors of the South Waziristan Militia, the
exultant Wazirs were joined by the Pathan tribes of the Zhob, Sheranis
and Mando Khel, and by Suliman Khel nomads from Afghanistan.
The Mullahs preached the Jehad, telling of Afghan armies pouring into
India like the hordes of Mahmud Ghuznavi.

It was all too much for the Zhob Militia. Eight hundred of its Pathans
deserted and most of its posts were abandoned and looted by tribesmen.
On 3 June the post at Manikhwa, twenty-four miles east-north-east of
Fort Sandeman, was tamely surrendered to Wazirs and Sheranis. The
garrison was composed of nomadic Ghilzais from Afghanistan, who
had elsewhere shown themselves to be thoroughly unreliable (not

surprising in the circumstances); and their Pathan officers when they made their way to Fort Sandeman, explaining the mishap, said that the enemy had put a spell on their rifles which would not fire. But that was the last really bad performance put up by the Zhob Militia. There remained true to their salt two companies of North-West Frontier Pathans, mainly Orakzais, one squadron of Pishin Kakars, a fairly tractable Pathan tribe in Baluchistan, and a squadron and a company of Brahuis, a very wild, hairy and almost unknown nomad tribe, not Pathan, from the desert country south-west of Quetta. But so shaky and unreliable did these faithful remnants appear that when, on the approach of a large enemy lashkar, the garrison and civilians of Fort Sandeman were withdrawn inside the perimeter, they were left outside. When, however, Fort Sandeman was attacked, and the bazaar burnt, it was the Zhob Militia who drove the enemy off.

There followed some weeks of scrappy fighting along the Fort Sandeman-Loralai road in which several small columns were cut up by mixed Wazir-Sherani-Suliman Khel lashkars, culminating in a spectacular disaster near Kapip. An entire convoy and its escort were routed in hand-to-hand fighting, four British officers and forty-nine other ranks killed, seventy-one wounded, all the carts and two guns lost. 'After this,' says the Official Report, 'all was chaos and the troops, with the exception of the rearguard of Zhob Militia, split up into twos and threes and made their way to Fort Sandeman during the night.'

The honour of the Zhob Militia was further restored by a fine exploit of Subadar Major Gulab Khan on 11 October. After leading fifty rifles on a forced march of sixty miles, he surrounded the village of the doyen of Militia deserters, ex-Subadar Haji Mir, killed him and ten of his followers and recovered twelve Government rifles.

In Waziristan and Zhob the loss of magazine rifles was particularly serious. The tribes had acquired modern rifles by theft and capture from ill-trained, post-war army units, by purchase from Afghanistan, and from the Middle East which for four years had been flooded with arms, distributed wholesale by the British and Turkish Governments to any Arabs who might take their side. Moreover they turned out in tribal rifle-factories, with simple hand-tools, foot-operated lathes and looted rails, remarkably good imitations of the Lee Enfield service rifle, complete with regimental numbers, which were nearly as accurate as the genuine article until, after about 300 rounds, the rifling began to wear. It was not unknown for soldiers to sell their rifles for 500 to 600 rupees and buy for 150 rupees replicas so good as to pass all but the most

expert annual inspection. For as little as 40 rupees a poor man could buy a single-shot Martini-action rifle firing the ordinary ·303 ammunition. The Mahsud factories at Kanigurum were not very accessible, but the Afridi factories beside the Kohat pass were only a few yards across the border, a popular tourist attraction. They did seem to be cocking a snook at the Sarkar, and from time to time consideration was given to closing them down. But what was the point? They would merely be established a few miles back. It would be more effective to concentrate on preventing the tribesmen acquiring bullets and empty cartridge-cases from rifle-ranges, with which to replenish their ammunition with the help of cordite and caps smuggled out of Kabul Arsenal. Rifles and ammunition in Tribal Territory were expensive, but there was no real shortage.

There are differences of opinion about tribal marksmanship. The popular image of the bearded sniper able to shoot the eye out of a gnat has been challenged by those who ask, 'How could he afford the ammunition for practice enough to make him a crack shot? Was not his skill really in field-craft and concealment, in never squeezing the trigger unless he had a good chance of a hit?' But it is on record that the South Waziristan Scouts, better shots than most army battalions, invited a Mahsud team to enter for a falling-plate competition. The Mahsuds, using Government rifles and ammunition, won.

The Army, back from France, Palestine, East Africa and Mesopotamia, was ill-trained for the special conditions of the Frontier. Accustomed to fighting against conscripts who sprayed the country with lead but were not noted for straight shooting, officers and men found it disconcerting in Waziristan that every shot seemed to be aimed at each of them, personally. To safeguard the long, vulnerable columns of camels, mules, horses and lorries every height within 1,500 yards of a brigade's axis of advance had now to be piqueted, slowing to snail's pace every advance and seriously complicating every withdrawal. The new rifles fired smokeless powder; no longer could a sniper be located by a puff of smoke every time he fired. In the 1890s a Pathan lashkar with its coloured banners had shown up like a field of flowers on the mountainside; now it was seldom visible since the tribesmen, including thousands of ex-soldiers, soon adapted their tactics to their new weapons, slipping from shadow to shadow, from brown-grey rock to grey-green gurgura bushes, covering every knife-rush with accurate long-range fire, and in pursuit of a withdrawing piquet dropping from foothold to foothold like wild goats, bounding down the steep scree like falling boulders.

Having nothing else to do with their time, they would study for days or weeks the habits of a convoy-escort, a standing piquet, a watering- or range-party until they saw develop some careless habit or tactical error – a patch of dead ground or thorn-scrub left unchecked, men moving across the open without a supporting section lying prone, a round in the chamber, finger on trigger, ready to give instant covering-fire. Then they struck – a volley and a knife-rush and away into the hills with their captured rifles and ammunition, leaving half-a-dozen mutilated corpses, a hideous offence under the sky.

It is strange how little has been written about the military organisation and chain-of-command of the tribes, which must have been sophisticated enough to control lashkars numbering thousands, carrying out complicated tactical movements. It was similar to the Scottish Highlanders' system, each family, sept and clan following some proven war-leader who was not formally elected, but was nevertheless the tribe's choice. There were also marauding outlaw gangs drawn from several tribes, attracted by the fame of some Robin Hood whose raids were generally successful.

The formidable character of Mahsuds and Wazirs and the respect – awe – they inspired may be judged from extracts from an army pamphlet produced by HQ Waziristan District in 1924:

> The physique, powers of endurance and experience gained by the Mahsud and Wazir in years of incessant raiding made him a formidable enemy in his own hills, and there are quite 3,000 to 4,000 of them who have served in the Militia or Regular Army, and have an intimate knowledge of our habits and tactics . . .
>
> Owing to his activity on the hillside and general watchfulness it is almost impossible to outflank him or cut off his retreat . . .
>
> When the troops commence to retire, it is astonishing how numbers of the enemy will appear in places which had seemed to be deserted, and the rearguard will be harried in the most determined manner. Every opportunity which occurs of cutting off small parties will at once be seized . . .
>
> The Mahsud or Wazir is an expert at attacking convoys or small detachments and is assisted by the nature of his country, the ravines being narrow and winding, while the hillsides in the western tracts are often thickly covered with bushes. He attacks systematically, with special parties told off for specific duties, such as the neutralising of adjacent piquets by fire, supports to his advanced parties of swordsmen, etc. . . . Ambushes may sometimes open by a few shots

> from one side of the nullah. Untrained troops rush to cover on the side from which fire comes. This is what is waited for. Heavy accurate fire from the other bank then finishes the party.
>
> Against troops proceeding to take up position the usual plan is to ambush the leading party of the advanced guard, firing a volley and charging immediately. Knives are used to cut free rifles and equipment, and the tribesmen make off in the inevitable confusion before a counter-attack can be organised . . .
>
> Do not let a man approach you in enemy's country scratching his stomach, he is looking for his knife. Hit him on the elbow with a stick and he'll drop it . . .
>
> Avoid shaking hands with strange Pathans. They will seize with their left hand and stab with their right on occasions . . .
>
> Mahsuds or Wazirs brought to bay always fight desperately. Should a party be surprised completely without hope of escape, an immediate and determined counter-attack must be expected.

The fiercest fighting of 1919–20 took place after peace with Afghanistan was signed. There was a real war against the Mahsuds and, to a lesser extent, the Wazirs. Never had the tribes been so well-armed, never had their morale been so high. And the Army was not at its best, the war-time soldiers having been discharged, and the ranks filled with young recruits, many battalions with little mountain warfare and no Frontier experience. An unusual feature of a very savage war was that from time to time it was halted, temporarily, by the arrival in the British camp of parties of enemy with flags of truce, wearing their war-medals, come to shake hands and chat with the officer who had commanded them in East Africa.

Of the South Waziristan Militia, one company, carefully selected, operated as an integral part of a regular battalion. They performed well and went some way to restoring the Militia's good name. Otherwise the remnants of the corps remained at Tank, re-training and re-forming. The North Waziristan Militia, who remained in Dardoni, Miranshah and Idak posts, were involved in minor piqueting and patrol actions.

6

The New Model Scouts

The post-1919 plan for Waziristan was that it would be dominated from within, when the necessary motor-roads were completed, by one brigade at Razmak and one at Wana. A circular motor-road would be built to link Jandola, Wana and Razmak, and descend from Jandola to Tank. This road system would be linked by the Central Waziristan road to the Bannu-Miranshah-Datta Khel road, and with the Kurram.

What part would the Frontier Corps play in this?

After the unhappy events of 1919 there were plenty of soldiers to say, 'none at all'. Lord Reading, the Viceroy, recommended that the Frontier Corps be converted into Frontier Constabulary and officered by the Indian Police, which was in fact the fate of the ephemeral Mohmand Militia raised in 1917 and disbanded three years later. The Khyber Rifles were disbanded. The Zhob Militia barely survived, but later made a good recovery. The Chitral Scouts and the Kurram Militia had come through the ordeal with credit; the Gilgit Scouts had been on the sidelines. But what was to be done with the Waziristan Militias?

They had been based on a fallacy: that good officers can make reliable soldiers of trans-Frontier Pathans serving in their own districts and often fighting against their kith-and-kin. The desertions had been confined mainly to Wazirs and Afridis; other tribes – cis-Frontier Khattaks, Yusufzais and Bangash, trans-Frontier Orakzais, Mohmands and Bhitannis – had in the main remained loyal despite strong religious and political pressures. It was decided that, reformed on different lines with the Army always at hand to support them, they could still play a useful role. So from the loyal elements of the North

and South Waziristan Militias and the Mohmand Militia were raised the Tochi Scouts and the South Waziristan Scouts (SWS), based on a more realistic appreciation.

The Tochi Scouts had a Headquarters Company of specialists (signallers, armourers, etc.), two troops of Mounted Infantry, each fifty-nine strong; and two infantry 'Wings', each the equivalent of a battalion. Its total strength was twelve British officers and 2,278 Pathans. The South Waziristan Scouts (SWS) had a Headquarters Company, two troops of Mounted Infantry and three infantry wings, a total of fourteen British officers and 2,774 Pathans. Each corps was commanded by a Major, Wings by Captains, companies by Subadars, platoons and troops by Jemadars. Each rank carried far more responsibility than in the Army.

British officers in Scouts were not, as was widely believed, the insolvent and the dissolute, on the run from moneylenders and irate husbands (at least, not all of them). They joined the Tochi Scouts, SWS, Kurram and Zhob Militia (Chitral and Gilgit were rather different) for a variety of motives, the most common being a wish to see active service, during what was expected to be a lifetime of dull, peaceful soldiering. No man would join unless he had a strong liking for Pathans, whom many Indian Army officers profoundly distrusted. An active outdoor life was an attraction, far better than sitting in some citadel of military bureaucracy. Some joined to give themselves time, in the long, lonely evenings in outposts, to study for the Staff College, some to have three months' leave every year, either to go home, or to trek into the high Himalayas, three weeks' march from Srinagar, to stalk *ovis ammon*, markhor and ibex. Last but not least was the financial motive. Scouts officers drew quite generous mileage allowances, and what was in fact a sort of hard-lying allowance or danger-money, though it was not called that. There was a large lump sum for passing the Higher Standard Pushtu examination, and it was impossible to spend much money in Ladha or Datta Khel posts. This meant that officers who were in debt, or saving up to get married, were drawn to Scouts. A large proportion came from 'Piffer'* regiments, which were traditionally Frontier-minded. Not many cavalry officers joined the Scouts since it took a man away from serious polo. (Those who did generally gravitated to the Mounted Infantry, but they had to do six months in an infantry wing first. Lurid was the language of Carlo Platt

* Punjab Frontier Force. Originally irregular units stationed always on the Frontier. They lost their irregular status and their near-monopoly of Frontier postings during the Kitchener reforms, but they still *thought* Frontier.

of the Eighth Cavalry when he discovered after his six months' obligatory foot-slogging in the Tochi Scouts that he could no longer get into his beautiful Maxwell polo-boots.)

Officers were seconded from the Army for three years, extendable to five. At the end of his term there would be a magnificent farewell party in the Officers' Mess, a farewell feast with the Pathan officers, and next morning with bursting head the officer would drive away, the men cheering and the Mounted Infantry galloping alongside letting off firecrackers. After three or four years with their regular battalions and regiments, they could, and many did, do second and third tours with the Scouts; but whereas a single tour was an asset to an ambitious soldier, more than one was liable to put him out of the running for the Staff and for high command.

When the reputation of the new model scouts had become well established, that is by about 1924, there was much competition among British officers to join. It was rather like joining a very small, very exclusive club. Not only did a candidate have to have a first-class report from his regiment, and some command of Pushtu (which generally improved in outposts when he was speaking little else), but he had to stay a couple of weeks with a corps, at headquarters and in outposts, to be 'vetted'. A man might be a very good regular soldier, but still be unsuitable for Scouts. There were very few British officers in a corps but they might have to spend weeks alone or with another officer in an outpost, and this required a certain temperament. Loneliness or an uncongenial partner could drive some men to drink, murder or suicide. If a man was idle, or too earnest, cantankerous, a bore, physically soft, could not hold his drink, or had the wrong approach to Pathans, he was out. A veto from a single officer, a hint from the Subadar Major that he would not quite do, and that was that. No officer on his first tour with the Scouts could be married. Not only were officers' wives not allowed in Waziristan, but the Treasury had strong objection to paying a widow's pension for forty or fifty years.

Most British officers, knowing some Pushtu before coming to the Scouts, worked up to Higher Standard during their first few months. If they had difficulty in passing, they were sent to Peshawar for a month's cramming under the famous *munshi*, Ahmed Jan. He was an inspired teacher, and a tyrant. Ralph Venning, still with his battalion, went to him to learn enough Pushtu to speak to shikaris and such. Ahmed Jan told him, 'You are only a lieutenant of Gurkhas, so my fee will be one hundred cigarettes. But you will come to me for Higher Standard, and then I shall *rook* you.' His cramming course was no rest-cure. The day

started with one hour's lesson under the Master himself; then another hour with an old man who in a very broad Afridi accent told tales of *The Thousand and One Nights*, unexpurgated and very 'interesting'; in the afternoon an hour's conversation with Ahmed Jan and a group of Frontier Constabulary sepoys of various tribes and various accents; then home-work – grammar exercises and translations, always using the Persian script. Ahmed Jan was not the only Pushtu-teacher, but he was the only one who could show a testimonial signed by Captain A. P. Wavell of the Black Watch in 1906.

Major Russell continued in command of South Waziristan Militia through its disbanding in 1921 and its re-forming, with elements of the Mohmand Militia, as the South Waziristan Scouts. In the past he had believed implicitly in Pathans, believed that one could *always* trust them, and he had chosen his orderlies from the wildest trans-Frontier tribes. According to Barker, during and immediately after the mutiny in Wana, Russell had been surprisingly philosophical and tolerant, insisting that the scuttle from Waziristan had tried loyalty too far. But brooding over these events, his attitude had hardened. Never again would he wholly trust a Pathan. On two points he was adamant: there would never be less than two cis-Frontier Pathans to one trans-Frontier in the corps and he would have no Mahsuds or Wazirs at any price. He retained the tribal companies – Khattak, Afridi, Yusufzai, Orakzai, Mohmand, and others – but as administrative, not operational units. Never again would any post be garrisoned wholly, or even mainly, by men of one tribe; its garrison would be drawn from several companies. The arrangement was administratively clumsy, and not conducive to good training, but it was, Russell thought, a necessary precaution against mutiny. He never talked about 1919, and left his juniors to make up their minds about Pathans. As a result they usually did what he had done – preferred the wilder trans-Frontier tribes and chose orderlies from them, rather than from the more reliable, less colourful, Khattaks, Bangash and Yusufzais.

Denis Ambrose was a subaltern in the 1/6th Rajputana Rifles at Sararogha fort in 1923. Fourteen miles to the south, at Jandola, the new South Waziristan Scouts were still searching for a new identity, while being responsible for piqueting about twenty miles of road from Kotkai through Jandola to Khirgi. Convoys of camels, mule-carts and, as tracks were up-graded into roads, an increasing number of lorries, passed back and forth every day. There was an ambitious programme of road construction to open up the country to trade and, incidentally, to

troops – Jandola to Ramzak, Jandola to Wana, and eventually to Razmak. Waziristan was officially at peace, but there were many hostiles who considered themselves still at war, and the weekly casualty list was quite heavy.

To Ambrose and his fellow-subalterns:

> the Scouts were something of an enigma. We knew that they had mutinied and killed most of their British officers only three years previously. Yet here they were trusted with our protection over two of the most dangerous sectors of the road, acting in conjunction with the Khassadars.* Now the Khassadars we could see. They sat by the roadside and grinned as the convoy passed. But the Scouts, who were primarily responsible, we never saw during the day, except perhaps for a British officer, dressed in a semi-mufti uniform outfit, going up to the Column Commander (never the Adjutant or Company Commander) and assuring him in the friendliest manner that he might safely proceed. But whether the Khassadars or the Scouts were responsible, the casualties did not occur in the Scouts' sector. Sometimes the shooting would occur immediately after leaving their sector, when the Army piquets began to take up their positions; and of course it would be whispered that in all probability the Scouts and the Mahsuds were working together and that the whole episode had been fixed up between them. However, these ideas were later modified when we learned that the Scouts too were getting a weekly casualty list.

The Scouts officers whom Ambrose met spoke well of Russell, enjoyed being in Scouts and liked the men.

> Their main point was, why serve on the Frontier with a regular regiment, sitting in camp behind barbed wire, and never moving out except on regular piqueting routine, when, instead, you can have the freedom of Scout life, the whole countryside to roam over, carrying a shot-gun instead of a revolver.

So Ambrose and a fellow-subaltern, H. G. Boulter, applied for secondment to Scouts, and a few weeks later they were told to report to Jandola for interview. Russell talked to them outside his tent, a

* Un-uniformed tribal levies, armed with their own rifles.

short, stocky man, red-faced, hatless, dressed in a grey flannel shirt, shorts and heavy chaplis.* Ambrose records:

> His main idea seemed to be to find out why we wanted to join the Scouts . . . It was difficult in those days to give an adequate reason, for the Scouts were still heavily under a cloud and had not attained the prestige which came many years later. Perhaps we were obviously keen, for to our relief we were accepted on three months' probation.
>
> The camp at Jandola was not very different from the army camp at Bararogha, except that it was not so tidy. There was the same barbed wire, behind which were rows of tents. Whereas the army was provided with a certain number of huts, the Scouts had none, for the policy was eventually to build forts.
>
> At the time the Scouts were recruiting heavily. Consequently there were always several hundred recruits under training. The recruits themselves were fairly smart in their turn-out and drill, but as soon as a party of them joined the ranks of the 'old soldiers' it seemed to be a point of honour with them to forget all their drill and become as lax and slovenly as the rest. The idea was that the Army was smart, the Army went in for spit-and-polish. But look how useless they were when they got into the hills! Look at their rate of progress on the march! Look at their ponderous piqueting! Compare that with the speed, the endurance, the tactical sagacity of the Scouts! So the Scouts and, sad to say, the junior officers of the Scouts were inclined to look down on the ability and utility of the Army . . . whereas the Army frankly mistrusted the Scouts.

Before 1919 discipline under Russell had been on the soft side, now it was harsh – twenty-eight days' Rigorous Imprisonment for quite a minor offence. A Summary Court Martial, consisting of Russell and one other officer, could sentence a man to a year in Bannu jail; the Political Agent could sentence him to death. Russell was equally severe on the Subadars and Jemadars, having many sacked in the early days, and they greatly feared but respected him. Subadars commanding companies had wide disciplinary powers and often awarded punishments not in the book.

Newly joined officers were kept fully occupied just as they would be in a regular battalion – on parades, range-work, platoon-training, office-work, the study of Pushtu. Occasionally, with a more experi-

* The Pathan sandal, now obtainable in any Brompton Road shoe-shop.

enced officer, they went out on a patrol, known in the Scouts as a 'gasht'. But these gashts were quite short, generally through the foothills to protect a convoy's flank. When Ambrose joined the South Waziristan Scouts in 1923 the Jandola-Razmak road had not got far beyond Sararogha, and work on the Jandola-Wana road had not begun. None of the Scouts forts had been built so they lived uncomfortably in oppressive heat or snow in tents surrounded by dry-stone perimeter walls. The longest outing from Jandola was to escort the weekly convoy of camels through the dangerous Shahur Tangi to provision the Scouts' posts at Chagmalai at the bottom of the Tangi, Splitoi at the top, and Sarwekai, where Bowring had been murdered. It was three days out and three days back. Such was the sinister reputation of the Shahur Tangi that Ambrose was not entrusted with this outing until he had been some months with Scouts and could speak fairly good Pushtu.

Occasionally the patrol would come across a Mahsud gang on its way to or from a raid, shots would be exchanged, a man or two might be hit, but, says Ambrose,

> I do not recall any brilliant captures in those early days. On the other hand there were no serious losses of arms or of men from the Scouts' patrols, which, considering the state of training and the absence of high morale, was probably the best one could expect . . .
>
> [One night] there was a shout from the Medical Officer who woke up to find a man in his tent. The rifle-thief and two of his companions got out through a gap in the wire, and a volley of shots from outside covered their escape. Every piquet blazed away into the night, but apparently no one was hurt. All the raiders got was the MO's revolver. But next morning Russell's wrath fell heavily on the camp piquets in the vicinity of the cut wire: chiga* party drill was intensified and security tightened up. There were no more such cases.

Early in 1924 Russell was appointed Inspecting Officer of Frontier Corps (IOFC) with a general supervision over (but not operational command of) the South Waziristan Scouts, Tochi Scouts, Kurram Militia, Chitral Scouts and later the Zhob Militia. He was succeeded in command of the SWS by Major S. P. Williams. Williams had missed the war; because he had defied a vindictive CO by marrying too young, he had languished in a training depot for four long years and escaped

* A party of about platoon strength ready in every camp for immediate pursuit.

only to go to the Zhob Militia. The young officers of the SWS, who regarded themselves as the tough boys of the Frontier, viewed his appointment with misgiving: they needed no paterfamilias from the Zhob to teach them their job.

How wrong they were. Williams – 'Stanley Pip' as they named him – turned out to be tall, sinewy, very tough, with a jaw like a battleship's prow, slightly stooping and rather deaf. His outlook differed from Russell's. Not having been with the Militia in 1919, he had suffered no disillusion, and he blamed the Government's policy rather than the men themselves for those unhappy events. He genuinely loved Pathans as a race, placed them far above any other martial race of India, had no wish to serve with any other, and had helped build up the morale and efficiency of the Zhob Militia. His wife was the niece of the famous Frontier officer, G. O. Roos-Keppel, from whom he learned a thing or two.

His Pushtu was excellent, but it was the classical Pushtu of Peshawar, comparable to 'the King's English'. One day, inspecting a squad of recruits, he stopped to ask one a question. The youth, his ear attuned only to the broad dialect of his tribe, taken aback by the formidable Faranghi addressing him incomprehensibly, turned helplessly to a neighbour and asked, 'For God's sake, what does he say?' Stanley Pip exploded – but was instantly penitent, and soon had all the recruits grinning.

He retained the 2:1 proportion of cis- to trans-Frontier tribes and he retained the tribal platoons. But in order to make the company an operational as well as an administrative unit, he grouped into one company five platoons of different tribes of which never more than two were trans-Frontier. Thus a company might have one Afridi and one Mohmand platoon from across the border, and Khattak, Bangash and Yusufzai platoons from British India. Its commander and second-in-command would be from none of those tribes; they might perhaps be Orakzai, Bhitanni or Mullagori. The result was an increase in efficiency, a rise in morale, and a strong, non-tribal, company *esprit de corps*, a competitive spirit in sports and emulation in action. The Mounted Infantry was composed of two troops of mixed tribes. Nevertheless, although a complete company could thereafter be used in operations, the basic operational unit was the platoon. Scouts spoke and thought in terms of gashts or garrisons of nine platoons, not of two companies. A Subadar commanding A Company would often find himself commanding a gasht which included platoons from B and C Companies.

The Khattaks, living mainly in the Nowshera, Bannu and Kohat districts of British India, were the most heavily recruited Pathan tribe both in the Army and the Scouts. Afridis affected, not very seriously, to disparage them as not true Pathans. '*Bhang largai na shi*,' they would say scathingly, '*Khattak serai na shi*.' ('The cannabis plant cannot be wood, and a Khattak cannot be a man.') But they were valued highly as being more reliable than other Pathans, having taken on some of the characteristics of their neighbours the Punjabi Mussulmans, backbone of the Indian Army. The Yusufzais had in the past provided most of the Pathan recruits for some famous regiments, but by the late 1920s had become somewhat infected by politics, rather commercial-minded, and perhaps a little spoilt by the easier life consequent upon canal irrigation. The third cis-Frontier tribe were the Bangash who lived around and west of Kohat. They were a smaller tribe than the Khattaks but similar in character and reliability. Adjacent to the Turi, they included some Shiah sections. They were better educated than most Pathans, and their young men provided the backbone of a celebrated football team, Kohat Shining.

Foremost of the trans-Frontier tribes were the Afridis, something of an enigma. In 1897 a large British force had invaded the Tirah, burnt villages, destroyed crops and felled walnut and chenar and mulberry trees; but they had then withdrawn in mid-winter in some haste and confusion, leaving the Afridis with the impression that in the end they had won – the Sarkar would never again invade the Tirah. Nor did it. Sir John Maffey, Chief Commissioner of the North-West Frontier Province, wrote in the aftermath of 1919 of

> the flash of Pathan eyes and the frenzy of the drums echoing from the rocks when over the campfires the Afridis sing their ballad of 1897. '*Ai! People of Islam, the Holy War!*' Through it all, when peace and friendship come again . . . for we do like one another . . . we remain always the enemy, the infidel power which tries to take from them their God-granted slagheap of mountain trash. But without avail! To Allah the praise!

Yet after 1919 Afridis in Scouts behaved splendidly, and provided more than their share of outstanding officers. They made excellent fighting men, using their brain as well as their brawn, though inclined to be distracted from the job in hand by private feuds and sectional differences. Between 1919 and 1941 recruitment of Afridis in the Army almost ceased, because they had proved so unreliable; so the Scouts got the pick of the tribe.

The Mullagoris are a small, cheerful and well-behaved tribe living in the north of the Khyber. The Orakzais, the second most heavily recruited tribe, live in the south of the Tirah and are steadier in character than the Afridis. They, like the Bangash, have some Shiah sections. They are great travellers, many going to sea as deck-hands and stokers. The Mohmands, from the great mountains north of Peshawar, were also regarded as being too unreliable for army recruitment, and had a reputation for cruelty and treachery, but in the Scouts they made good soldiers. The Bhitannis live in the hot, stony, arid hills east of Jandola. They are neighbours and enemies of the Mahsuds, and pride themselves on being 'the stone on which the Mahsud broke his teeth'. In fact, the Mahsud generally got the better of their raids and counter-raids.

All this and much more about the tribes had to be known by a Scouts officer. Nor was it enough to know that Naik Gul Sher Khan was an Afridi; one had to know whether he was, for instance, a Malik Din Khel from the proudly independent Tirah where no Faranghi had set foot since 1897, or an Adam Khel from Kohat pass – Tribal Territory, to be sure, but so accessible to troops and police that he could almost be regarded as a cis-Frontier man.* One had to know whether an Orakzai was Sunni or Shiah. It was symptomatic of Scouts' attitudes that a Pathan was seldom mentioned in reports or orders without his tribe, and often his section being specified. Thus one reads that Subadar Major Mehdi Khan, Saghri Khattak, was awarded the IOM; that Havildar Mastan, Orakzai, Ali Khel, was promoted Jemadar; that Naik Khial Badshah, Afridi Sipah, was killed.

Nothing was more important than the choice of the right men for promotion. Theoretically this should be decided entirely on merit, but the officer who made merit the only criterion, ignoring seniority and a rough tribal balance, would find himself commanding a resentful, even mutinous, rabble.

Claude Erskine, the first Commandant of the Tochi Scouts, with his young face and grey hair, was a man similar in ideas and style to S. P. Williams and his corps developed on similar lines. There was one notable difference: under pressure from George Cunningham, the resident, Waziristan, the Tochi enlisted about a hundred Wazirs to take advantage of their local knowledge and contacts. Half were trans-Frontier, and half men of the Jani Khel who lived near Bannu,

* In calculating the proportion of cis- and trans-Frontier men, the Adam Khel were counted as half-and-half.

just inside British India. They produced some good Pathan officers, but were always an anxiety. How should they be organised? At first they were formed in two platoons, one Jani Khel, the other trans-Frontier. But this was risky, and besides it was not making use of their local knowledge, which was the main reason for their enlistment. It was decided to split them up, a couple of Wazirs to each non-Wazir platoon. They felt affronted at the obvious slight and complained (probably not without reason) that they did not get a fair deal in promotions. So they were re-formed in two platoons. Then it became hard to fill the trans-Frontier platoon. Tori Khel, Manzar Khel and Khaddar Khel were all tried in turn, and none was satisfactory: the young men preferred the less exacting service of a Khassadar. Eventually, after the Khaddar Khel had notably misbehaved, the trans-Frontier platoon was disbanded, but the Jani Khel platoon remained and did good work. Another difference between the Tochi and the SWS was that in the former the Subadar commanding a company and his second-in-command were generally of tribes represented in that company.

Among the officers of the Tochi Scouts in the early days was 'Nat' Cosby, short, stocky, square-jawed with a shining morning face and generally a Burma cheroot sticking out of it. He had sailed round the Horn before the mast in a square-rigged ship; he had planted tea in Ceylon; he was the only officer in the 5th Royal Gurkha Rifles who was present at the landing on V-Beach in Gallipoli and at its evacuation, having collected in the meanwhile three wounds and an MC. Later he became a stickler for turn-out, but there is an agreeable picture of him in the early days of operations with the Razmak Brigade, clad in 'rat-catcher' (a loud tweed coat and cap), bounding down an adjoining precipice to the feet of the Brigade Commander, politely raising his headgear and saying, 'Your right flank is secure, Sir'.

He had in his Wing a very reliable Subadar who was a Tori Khel Wazir; he taught Cosby a lot about the tribes, and the first thing he taught was that when the garrison of a post changed, the locals would at once find out who were the new officers there, British and Pathan. On this they based their behaviour. A good post-commander had very little trouble; a not so good one, the reverse.

With British officers coming and going, continuity and *esprit de corps* depended mainly on the Centurions of the Corps, the Pathan Officers.* All were men of immense experience and awesome authority, particu-

* It is difficult to know what to call them. They used to be called 'Indian Officers', but after partition that is inappropriate. They cannot be called Viceroy's Commissioned

larly in their own tribal platoons with whom they had almost a paternal relationship. They had gained their commissions after not less than twelve years' service in the ranks. They knew inside-out the internal economy of the corps; they knew exactly how to control a gasht, place a piquet, conduct a difficult withdrawal. They knew in dealing with tribesmen when to be tough, when to be flexible, when to be genial and when to bluff. Many were illiterate and intended to remain so. The strange anomaly was that these splendid veterans, as they nearly all were, should cheerfully take orders from Subalterns younger and less experienced than themselves, albeit far better educated and more technically instructed. But the British officer would be very unwise, both in problems of man-management and in the field, if he did not ask the advice, generally offered with tact, of Pathan officers. Socially they were treated with the utmost respect by British officers, who invariably gave them the honorific of 'Sahib', and by other ranks who saluted them. Race, language and cultural differences implied a certain separation between British officers and Pathan officers, but there was no feeling of social superiority on one hand or inferiority on the other. They ate normally in their separate Messes, but were always glad to accept one another's hospitality. Pathan society is essentially democratic, and this was reflected in the very close relations between British officers and Pathans when they were together in small posts for weeks on end. Henry 'Flathead' Cubitt-Smith was even consulted by a childless Subadar on the intimate subject of marital techniques. 'The wonderful thing about Scouts', a newly-joined officer was told by his mentor in the SWS, 'is that when they get to know you, you make *such friends*.'

The Senior Pathan Officer was the Subadar Major who had no command but was the Commandant's confidential adviser on everything pertaining to the corps. His badge was the major's crown. Subadars (badge, two pips) commanded and were second-in-command of companies. They were supposed to be, and quite often were, above and unswayed by tribal prejudices. Jemadars (one pip) commanded platoons of their own tribes. In each platoon was a Havildar (sergeant), and Naiks and Lance Naiks commanding sections. The Mounted Infantry used the cavalry rank-system: the equivalent of Subadar was Risaldar; of Havildar, Daffadar; of Naik and Lance Naik, Lance Daffadar and Acting Lance Daffadar. A private soldier in the infantry

Officers, a term which came into use in the Army to distinguish them from Indians holding the King's commission, because their commissions were from the Chief Commissioner, later Governor of the NWFP. So let them be termed 'Pathan Officers'.

was a Sepoy, in the Mounted Infantry he was a Sowar. Outside the chain-of-command were the Jemadar Adjutants, one to each Wing, and Drill Havildars, who were responsible for recruit-training and NCO cadre classes. There were also Signal Jemadars and Quartermaster Jemadars.

Being fallible humans, selected by fallible humans, the Pathan Officers occasionally failed; but failure was rare.

Many were characters, some could be described as 'cards', such as Subadar Khan Baz, Afridi, Malik Din Khel, of the SWS. He was a formidable warrior – but much more. He was an inspired clown. Henry Cubitt-Smith's loving aunt sent him a bullet-proof waistcoat. He could not wear it on gasht: he would die of heat-stroke, unless he died first of ridicule. But it was just the thing for Khan Baz, about to depart on two months' leave in the Tirah which was crawling with his blood-enemies. So Cubitt-Smith presented it to him – and a few minutes later heard a clanging like a dozen blacksmiths at work, and shrieks of laughter. Investigating, he found Khan Baz sitting in a chair, wearing the waistcoat, being charged by several happy sepoys with tent-pole lances. He wore it again that afternoon, keeping goal in a football match.

He could neither read nor write, but employed as his amanuensis a more accomplished Signals Naik. At the start of every parade each Subadar was required to report his company's parade-state – so many Pathan officers, NCOs, sepoys, signallers etc. This, of course, was done verbally, formally, at attention – except by Khan Baz, who simply held up his hand, on the palm of which the numbers were written in indelible pencil.

In the battle-backchat which sometimes accompanied skirmishes between tribesmen and Scouts, who often knew one another by sight and by name, his stentorian voice was conspicuous.

'We're leopards!' would come a cry in the Mahsud dialect from the rocks above. 'Keep your distance!' (A bullet cracked overhead.)

'And I'm Subadar Khawn Bawz, Afridi, Malik Din Khel. *Staré mashé*!'*

'May God strike you dead, Khan Baz!'

'And may your arsehole split, Sher Dil!'

To the British officers he was generally known as KB, but the

* *Staré mashé*, 'May you not be tired' is the stock Pathan greeting, to which the proper reply is *Khwar mashé*, 'may you not be poor' – sometimes the height of irony as between a ragged tribesman beside the road and a British officer at the end of a 30-mile gasht.

Pathans called him '*Tabrur*', 'Cousin', with macabre irony since he was supposed to have killed most of his cousins. Going on furlough he bagged Jock Scotland, his Wing Commander, for some rounds of ball for his twelve-bore shot-gun, far more lethal at close range than a ·303 bullet. He needed them, he explained with patent insincerity, for bear and panther. On his return, Scotland asked if God had prospered his shikar. 'I got the bastard!' chortled KB, 'I got him! Even his bedclothes caught fire!'

Whatever might happen on leave, blood-feuds within the corps were absolutely forbidden. There were two Mohmand officers, Subadar Hujum, a dour veteran in the South Waziristan Scouts, a crack shot, and the flamboyantly moustachioed Jemadar Akram of the Tochi Scouts. Whenever they met in Waziristan they got on perfectly well. But by arrangement between the two Adjutants, they were never allowed on leave at the same time, nor were their leave-dates announced beforehand. One year someone slipped up: their leaves overlapped. Only Hujum returned, slightly less dour.

Recruits joined young, about seventeen, vouched for by Pathan officers and NCOs from their sections. What induced them to join? To some extent, money. Their emoluments may not seem lavish: by 1929, fifteen rupees a month basic pay, plus six rupees Ration Allowance, plus a Local Allowance of three rupees a month for the Tochi and five rupees, because of the more unhealthy climate, for the SWS. But to trans-Frontier Pathans, this was a considerable sum. Army pay was higher, but in the Army a man might have to serve far from Pathan country. Besides – an important point – if a tribesman died in the Army, he might be buried anywhere; whereas in the Scouts he was nearly always sent home for burial. Some villages were traditionally Army villages, some Scout villages, and on the whole recruiters did not poach. Recruits were certainly not drawn to Scouts by loyalty to a Faranghi Government, or to British officers whom they had never met. Some were attracted by tales told by older friends and relatives, some sought adventure, and the Pathan's sheer love of fighting was certainly a motive. But the greatest incentive was *izzat*, honour, for during the 1920s and 1930s the Scouts gained enormous prestige from one end of the Frontier to the other. A Scout on leave in his village, rose-bud over one ear, gold-embroidered waistcoat and *kullah*, telling tall tales of battle against Mahsud and Wazir, was a person to be envied and emulated. The recruits all came from the yeoman-farmer class. They enlisted initially for three years, which could be extended three years at

a time to a maximum of eighteen years. They were entitled to three months' furlough after every fifteen months, and generally a whole platoon went on furlough together, so that the effective strength of a five-platoon company was four platoons.

Recruits either came in under their own steam, or were brought by brothers and cousins returning from leave. They were inspected by the Adjutant, told to take off their shirts, sent for a run, medically inspected and given a few simple co-ordination tests. If they passed, they were put on the *Umedwar* (Hopeful) list and sent back home, to be called up as vacancies occurred according to their gradings – Excellent, Very Good, Good and Very Fair. The best Recruits Squad Victor Wain right, as Adjutant of the Tochi Scouts, knew, was one recruited wholly from Maliks' sons. Heredity or environment? Recruit training, known always as 'the Drill', took about six months, and was the responsibility of the Adjutant and Jemadar Adjutant.

Many Pathans – as in other aggressively martial races – are given to buggery. It is socially more or less tolerated, as in London and New York. The famous Pushtu love-song the *Zakmi Dil* (Wounded Heart) extols the charms of

> A boy across the river with a bottom like a peach,
> But alas! I cannot swim.

Like Knights Templar in their Syrian castles, and sailors at sea, Scouts lived for months without even speaking to a woman. But the official attitude to buggery was far from permissive, for whenever it occurred, there had been trouble – NCOs competing for the favours of a 'milk-faced boy', or a virtuous recruit shooting a randy old Havildar. The Pathan officers, with their knowledge of a recruit's background, and the Medical Officer with a sharp eye for physical evidence, nearly always managed to weed out potential Ganymedes, but there were occasional scandals. There was a young Bhitanni who complained that he had been raped by every man in a piquet. The Commandant, S. P. Williams, after exhaustive enquiries, concluded that he was lying in order to get an NCO into trouble, and sentenced him to a term of detention. A couple of years later Williams said to the Subadar Major, 'I was right in that case, wasn't I?' The Subadar Major looked him long in the eyes. 'No, Sahib, you were wrong. His story was true, every word of it.' In the Tochi, at a later date, a Bangi Khel Khattak shot dead an Orakzai Naik and sepoy who, he said, had tried to bugger him. It was a fiendishly difficult case for the Commandant. Eventually the Khattak

got away with twenty-eight days' Rigorous Imprisonment and dismissal for 'accidentally wounding'. But the whole Wing had to be reorganised so that Orakzais and Khattaks were not in future in the same company, lest the former regard it as a case for a blood-feud.

Unlike Major Russell, S. P. Williams and Claude Erskine believed that smartness made for good morale. They instituted a tremendous drive on drill and saluting. However irregular Scouts might be in the field, on parade and quarter-guard everyone had to be immaculately turned out – uniforms starched, leather and brass gleaming, rifles of course spotless, the hair of the northern tribes cut very short, of the southern Khattaks and Bhitannis combed, oiled, cut in a neat straight bob just below the ears. Drill, up to Guards' standard.

But on gasht their turn-out was entirely functional: khaki *pagri* wound tightly round a dome-shaped, padded *kullah*, *shamleh** hanging loose to shade the back of the neck; a shirt (in cold weather, perhaps two shirts and a brownish pullover) of khaki in the Tochi, and in the SWS of *mazri*, a stout, coarse blue-grey cotton flecked with black, khaki shorts in summer and in winter *partog*, baggy Pathan pyjamas of *mazri*. (The Mounted Infantry wore *partog* all the year round.) The footwear was a heavy leather chapli, studded with soft iron, broad-headed nails. Fifty rounds were carried in a leather bandolier over the left shoulder, and twenty more in two belt-pouches. From the leather belt hung a short bayonet. The quart-size aluminium water-bottle was larger and of better design than the Army model. In a haversack would be some wholemeal flour or parched gram, a couple of onions, a pinch of tea, sugar, a needle, thread and nails for repairing chaplis, and perhaps a grenade or two. British officers might include in their rations a tin of sardines or bully beef, but lightness was all: nothing must be carried which reduced speed. In night operations a rolled woollen cap-comforter was worn for warmth, and 'grass' sandals (actually made from dwarf-palm fibre rope) for silence. Sometimes in very cold weather the partog were tucked into hose-tops to give a plus-four effect. The grey and khaki blended perfectly with the landscape, especially as the shirt hung loose, flapping, Pathan-fashion, outside shorts or partog so that there was no straight, revealing line where shirt and shorts met.

Gone were the days when British officers wore 'ratcatchers' on operations; nor could they wear Sam Browne belt and topi. To avoid

* The *pagri*, turban, was wound round a *kullah*, skull-cap. The *shamleh* was the loose end of the *pagri*.

becoming targets for every sniper, they dressed exactly like the men. A officer's pagri was generally tied in the manner of his orderly's tribe since it was his orderly who had taught him how to tie it. Not that the get-up effectively camouflaged him: tribesmen could always tell a British officer by the way he walked.

In fairly peaceful times officers usually carried revolvers on gasht, in open holsters, slung on a strap over the shoulder, with loops on the strap to hold spare cartridges. In safe areas, where partridges were plentiful, they often carried shot-guns. But in bad times it was better to carry a rifle, as Ralph Venning of the SWS was instructed by Subadar Mohabbat, Aka Khel Afridi. 'Very well,' he replied, 'but I'm damned if I'll carry seventy rounds as well.' Mohabbat nodded implacably. 'Seventy rounds is seventy rounds.' And so it was.

The Scouts' weapon was the same as the Mahsuds', the ·303 rifle, the Short Magazine Lee-Enfield (SMLE) Mark III which had served the British Army so well throughout the First World War and was to be retained, slightly modified but by no means improved, throughout the Second World War. Although it has not the high rate of fire of semi-automatic rifles like the FN and the Kaloshnikov, it is far more accurate over a much longer range. A marksman can put all his shots into a 4-inch diameter bull's-eye at 200 yards, 15 inches at 600 yards and 24 inches at 1,000 yards; he can fire more than 15 aimed rounds a minute. And Scouts were marksmen, far better on the average than regular army soldiers; perhaps because they had no light machine-guns and carried less ammunition, they concentrated (like the tribesmen) on single-shot accuracy.

The Scouts had their own motor transport, at first heavy, slow but reliable Albion lorries. In 1928–9 these were replaced by six-wheeler Morris three-tonners, lighter and faster, but more temperamental. They managed to keep the old Albions as well.

The Mounted Infantry were a *corps d'élite* open only to the best men of three years' service. Their value was that, over suitable terrain, they 'could git thar the firstest with the mostest'.* They then dismounted and fought on foot. The horses were hardy countrybreds of about 14.2 hands, smaller and usually quieter than cavalry horses. Every few months the officer in charge of the Mounted Infantry, accompanied by a Risaldar, a party of sowars and a Veterinary Assistant went to the

* A tactical principle attributed to the great Confederate cavalry General, Nathan Bedford Forrest.

horse fairs at Amritsar or Dera Ghazi Khan. There would be horse-races and camel-races and donkey-races, tent-pegging, wrestlers, jugglers, snake-charmers, dancing boys – all the fun of the fair in choking clouds of dust and an incessant din. There was no formal auction: the officer looked at likely horses, bargained with the owners, called on the Veterinary Assistant to make sure they were sound and the mares not in foal, and somehow contrived to get them into the specially-fitted horse-wagons on the train. 'Fitz' FitzMaurice of the SWS, a sharp-eyed, humorous fox-hunter, speaking fluent Pushtu with a West Cork lilt, recorded one of these occasions: 'Saw 120 horses. Rode 30. Bought 12. A long day.' From railhead they were led up to Jandola or Miranshah, where those that were unbroken were lunged for a few days, backed and schooled in the Remount Ride. After six or eight weeks they were fit for gashts. Most of the training took place close to the rifle-ranges, to accustom them to rifle-fire. Each corps carried out its own equitation training, and potential instructors and remount-riders did a course with the nearest cavalry regiment. Every sowar carried on gasht two spare horse-shoes, fore and hind, and nails, and could in an emergency cold-shoe his pony.

The sowar carried his rifle in a short bucket, only a few inches deep, attached to the saddle, in which the butt rested, the rifle being held upright by the sling passed over the right shoulder.

Fighting only on foot, the Mounted Infantry had to have some arrangement for holding horses in cover and moving them as required. The cavalry practice was for one horse-holder to ride his own and lead three horses. To put more men into the firing-line, Scouts sometimes had one mounted horse-holder leading as many as seven horses – a very difficult feat, practised more during training than on operations.

Up to 1928 Scouts operated what was known in cavalry as the *silladar* system: each sowar owned his horse, buying it at a special low price out of stoppages from his pay. It was his property, he was responsible for looking after it, if it died or became unsound, he would have to replace it. If he did not live too far away, he would take it home on furlough. In theory, the system saved the corps money, and the sowar would take better care of his horse if it was his own. In practice horses were apt to return in poor condition, because in most villages there was not the good forage to which they were accustomed. The Scouts, therefore, like the cavalry, dropped the *silladar* system, and horses became corps property.

In the early 1920s, before increasing prestige attracted a better type of

recruit, Scouts had a great deal of wastage from desertion. No one ... minded a man taking himself off without his rifle; he was assumed ... a young fellow who did not know his own mind. Such unauthor... departures numbered 136 from the two Waziristan corps (out of a ... strength of about 5,000) in 1922–3, but as the quality of recruits, ... motivation and conditions of service improved, the number drop... steadily to twenty-seven in 1928–9. Desertion with a rifle was far ... serious, a black disgrace on the deserter's platoon and company. If ... deserter was later killed, none of his former comrades would think ... anything but a good riddance. In the early 1920s such deserti... numbered four or five a year, but by the end of the decade there ... been none for three years.

A more serious cause of wastage was sickness. Waziristan is mala... in places, the Scouts were living in tents for years until new outpo... were completed, there were no fresh fruit and vegetables, and sanita... conditions were not all they should be. Malaria, scurvy, dysentery ... jaundice all took their toll. In 1924–5 the Tochi Scouts lost twenty-... men by fatal illnesses, the SWS not less than seventy; half their streng... had to be admitted at some time of the year to hospital. But during ... next year mosquito nets were issued, and land was acquired for fr... and vegetable gardens. There was a determined effort to impro... sanitation, reduce fly-breeding and eradicate the anopheles mosquito ... the vicinity of posts. The results were dramatic: hospital admissio... were far lower, and during the year 1925–6 the Tochi and the SWS lo... only eight and nine men respectively.

Nothing shows up better the improvement during the 1920s ... discipline, morale, living conditions and the standard of recruits tha... the steady reduction of wastage by desertion and sickness. But nothing could make Waziristan a health resort; mosquito nets could not be used on gasht and on night operations; the anti-malaria prophylactic mepacrine, had not yet been invented. And even mosquito nets were no protection against the tiny sandfly and the debilitating fever it caused. So malaria, sandfly-fever and diarrhoea were hazards that had to be put up with, helped by doses of quinine, aspirin and chlorodyne, and applications of citronella oil.

Each corps maintained a semi-private fund, known in the South Waziristan Scouts as the 'Corps Fund' or 'Garden Fund', into which went profits from the sale of milk, vegetables and fruit, and fines levied on the men for minor disciplinary offences; out of the Fund payment was made for seeds, milch cows, garden implements and such like. Somehow the Fund escaped the attention of the Military Accounts

officer, until one paid an unexpected visit to Jandola and Nat Cosby had to come clean. At first the visitor was horrified and asked, 'What authority have you for this?' Cosby replied, 'Thirty years of usage and custom.' Proof that everything purchased had, indeed, been for the good of the corps mollified the Accounts Officer, and he gave good advice off the record on how to run this equivocal fund in future. It was of the utmost value to commandants to have money for immediate needs without prolonged arguments with accounts babus, brown and white.

Each Wing trained its own recruits before they passed into the ranks. In 1934 there were three officers at Sarwekai – Captain E. D. Moorhead, Captain Denis Ambrose, and Lieutenant G. H. Tapp. The last was in charge of recruit training with the Jemadar Adjutant. There was a squad of forty recruits just due to complete 'the Drill' and pass into the ranks. To Tapp it seemed that a final polish could be given by taking them up the Barwand Raghza where they were sure to experience a little long-range sniping and have the opportunity to shoot back.

The Barwand Raghza is an open plain, about four miles wide, beginning close to Sarwekai and stretching north-eastward for some seven miles. It is an old talus fan of gravel shot out from the hills to the north, seamed with gullies and dry nullahs and traces of old terraced fields. Each time a gasht went beyond a certain point, a couple of hundred Mahsud villagers would swarm out and open fire on them. A lot of rounds would be fired on both sides and occasionally a man or two hit; the villagers never came very close, and their shooting was a mere protest, a 'trespassers will be prosecuted' warning. Next day the Political Agent would fine them a few country-made rifles, and a month later the same thing would occur again. Just the right experience, thought Tapp, for the recruits. In this he was abetted by Moorhead who could not abide a no-go area under his very nose, and enjoyed the excitement of a scrap, the pitting of wits and skill and courage against a worthy enemy.

The forty recruits, under the Jemadar Adjutant with the drill Havildar and a couple of Naik instructors, made an excellent 'advance to contact' over the open plain, well spread out, two sections in turn moving forward, the other two in position to give covering fire. In the distance some grey-clad figures were seen running from a village on the left, and soon the drums started thudding first in one, then in other villages. Tapp began to feel the exercise was getting out of his control

as, indeed, it was; he should never have crossed the Barwand Ra with less than four platoons of seasoned Scouts. He gave the orde withdraw.

'They'll be shooting soon,' warned the instructors; and, sure enou they did. Scores of tribesmen were getting closer, screened by nullahs and scrub, and working round the flanks. However, the rear behaved with admirable steadiness, two sections giving covering while the other two leap-frogged back past them. Then one in the r section was killed, and immediately afterwards his section command The section, leaderless, retired in disorder, leaving the bodies of men and their rifles, which had to be recovered. The tribesmen w now firing at close range.

Tapp halted the retirement and went back with his orderly and Naik for the rifles, and for the men if they were still alive. They lay the open about half-way between the rear section and the tribesmen hundred yards from each. Tapp and the men with him had not chance: he was killed, they were both wounded. There were now fo rifles and bodies left out in open ground.

The Jemadar Adjutant had got the remaining recruits under contro firing steadily to stop the Mahsuds approaching the bodies, but sho were coming at them from both flanks and almost from the rear. The could move neither forward nor back, and were now outnumbered fou or five to one.

Fortunately the firing had been heard in Sarwekai, and just as their position was becoming desperate, the chiga platoon was seen moving fast across the plain, followed by four more platoons under Ambros Confronted by a hundred seasoned Scouts, the Mahsuds withdrew to respectful distance.

Tapp was recommended for the VC but did not get it – perhaps because he had no business to be engaging in that sort of exercise.

The new tribal composition produced corps which were reliable in that it would be unlikely for a whole company to be infected at the same time with the same grievance or cause for disaffection; but because they included few Wazirs and no Mahsuds, the SWS and Tochi Scouts lacked really detailed local knowledge, topographical and personal. Pathans, serving in one district for years, acquired a far better knowledge of it than regular troops, but they could not know it as well as men who had been herding goats there as little boys, familiar not only with every nullah and path and patch of thorn-scrub, but every house and fortified tower – who owned it, how many sons he had, whether he was

to be deemed a friend or enemy. For this the Scouts had to rely on tribal police known in Waziristan as Khassadars, in Baluchistan as Levies. Armed with their own rifles, un-uniformed and, by and large, unreliable, they were nevertheless useful for road-protection and escorts in more or less peaceful times, since a neighbour would be reluctant to fire on them lest this start a tiresome blood-feud. For that very reason Khassadars were reluctant to fire on a neighbour, though they would fight raiders from outside. They looked upon themselves as servants of the tribe, helping the Jirga to carry out the Sarkar's policy, not as servants of the Sarkar. If, therefore, the tribe was at war with the Sarkar, the best that could be hoped of them was neutrality. 'Spit and no polish' was said to be their motto.

Tribal misbehaviour was met by a graduated response. If the Khassadars could not or would not settle the trouble, the Scouts were called in. If it was too much for the lightly armed Scouts, then along trundled the Razmak, Wana or Bannu Brigade with its artillery and machine-guns, its cavalry and armoured cars and light tanks and attendant aircraft. War was a word much in Mahsud and Wazir minds and on their lips. It means power or force. The success of a Political Agent, a Scouts Officer and a Malik depended on maintaining a balance of, and exerting the right amount of, *was*. It would be a bad Malik who, in the supposed interests of his tribe, provoked the Political Agent into bringing in the steam-roller of the Army; a bad Scouts officer who used excessive force where persuasion would have done the trick; a bad Political Agent who appealed unnecessarily for military support. Subadars of Khassadars – one of them was Darim Khan who had won the IOM with the North Waziristan Militia in 1915 – were very expert at estimating *was*.

The South Waziristan Scouts and the Tochi Scouts each regarded itself as the hardest fighting, longest gashting, deepest drinking corps, raising more hell on leave in Peshawar or Kashmir. The SWS boasted of having bigger mess-bills than any unit in the Empire; but the Tochi drank their beer out of *quart*-sized silver tankards.

Their style was subtly different. On leave in the Peshawar Club one would see Tochi officers in flannels and 'brothel-creepers', but SWS officers in mazri shirts and heavy chaplis. In efficiency there was nothing to choose between them; but the Tochi were the more relaxed, they had more social contacts with the tribesmen; the SWS, perhaps because they had Mahsuds to deal with, were the more 'regimental', the more aggressively on their toes, a tauter ship. Also, according to the Tochi, they were more addicted to bullshit: 'the sort of fellows who wear posteens in Delhi'.

7

The Militia Corps after 1920

The Kurram Militia was spared many of the problems which beset the two Waziristan corps because the local tribe was the ever-trusty Turi, the local lashkar regarded almost as a reserve for the Militia. Its role was not to police the tribe, which hardly needed policing except when there was a Sunni-Shiah conflict, but to stop raids and incursions from the Afghan tribes to the west and north, the Orakzais and Zaimukhts to the east and the Wazirs to the south-west; also to be, as in 1919, the first line of defence against a serious invasion.

The strength of the Kurram Militia in the 1920s was five British officers and 1,341 Pathans, organised into twenty-two platoons of Infantry and two troops of Mounted Infantry. They had their own artillery, two 10-pounder pack-guns, carried by mules or camels, which could be dismantled and assembled in a couple of minutes.

While most of the corps were Turis of the Shiah sect, there was as a counterweight a small Sunni element of two platoons of Khattaks and one each of Mangals and Chamkannis, handsome, cheerful people from the snowy hills along the Afghan border.

In 1927 the Khattaks were replaced by two platoons of Mahsuds, a triumph of hope over experience. True to type, several deserted with rifles. However, Harry Garland, when he commanded the corps, valued the Mahsuds. When a vacancy occurred for Subadar Major, the Inspecting Officer of Frontier Corps advised him not to give it to the senior Subadar because he was a Mahsud. 'But', wrote Garland, 'I did promote him, and he turned out absolutely first-class. Had I passed him over, the Mahsuds in Parachinar would have created merry hell, and

the situation would have been incredibly unpleasant. The Mahsuds in my time did extremely well, and I liked them very much.'

The Kurram was a true Militia, in the sense that it was composed mainly of local men defending their own country against the enemies who surrounded it. During the 1920s they were deployed in ten small posts, with garrisons varying from half a platoon to a platoon-and-a half, far less than any in the Tochi or SWS. These posts were too small to send out long, strong gashts; their role was local policing and the gathering of intelligence – not difficult since the locals were their friends and relations; and to act as staging posts for proper gashts sent out from the Militia's main fort at Parachinar where there were twelve platoons, the Mounted Infantry and the guns.

The Turis are fine, big fellows – bigger than most Pathans – and tough, brave soldiers, but the fact that they were an island of Shiahs (and very devout, indeed fanatical Shiahs) surrounded by Sunnis, and that they would serve only near home, had an effect on their character. They were rather introverted, much given to intrigue over, say, promotions which were, of course, nearly all in one tribe. They were flatterers, which is not a Pathan characteristic. 'The Sahib speaks wonderful Pushtu,' a Turi would say, knowing perfectly well that the Sahib did nothing of the sort. They even used to kiss the hand of the Turi Subadar who was a direct descendant of the Prophet, a military salutation which British officers deprecated.

Terence Phillips was invited to the Turi Mohurram celebrations, when they mourn the deaths at the Battle of Karbela (680), of the martyrs Hassan and Hussein, grandsons of the Prophet, who had opposed the Umaiyids' claim to the Khalifat. It is from that date that the Sunni-Shiah feud began. Phillips was at the time in the Tochi Scouts which had two platoons of Turis. But similar Mohurram celebrations took place in the Kurram Militia. He describes the scene:

> The lower barrack was all hung with printed cotton cloths and carpeted with rugs. Up at the end was the Mullah, with a solid mass of Turis nearest him. I could see nothing but bobbed heads sticking out of blankets. I thought I had better take a seat at the back, but was taken up to the front. The Mullah, a nice old man, was talking apparently in Arabic, but later changed to Pushtu, and we had the story of Hazrat Isa (Jesus Christ) from the conception by the Holy Ghost right through to the Crucifixion. Then he said something about Hassan and Hussein and the whole crowd hid their heads in their blankets and started sobbing, their shoulders shaking with grief

. . . All got to their feet and took off their shirts and to a chant of Hassan from one side and Hussein from the other, began beating their breasts with both hands clasped . . . Two men stepped into the middle with a kind of flail formed of a bunch of chains on a wooden handle and began beating their backs with rhythmic shouts of Hassan-Hussein, and the crowd became more and more excited, jumping in the air and shouting the names louder and louder . . . [By with tears and flagellation, the ceremony continued until] many backs were raw . . . Kadam Ali, my orderly, who stood about six feet four, was particularly devoted and his back was a mass of raw red marks with a brown background. Standing up in the light of the oil lamps he looked like some pagan god, Thor or Odin, with the steel chains swinging round his head, giving off flashes of light as they caught the rays of the lanterns . . . Soon it was all over and they sat down, and Mohamad Taqi told me I could go.

Such an exhibition was totally alien and indeed abominable to Sunni Pathans, and it says much for the discipline and tolerance of the Tochi Scouts, in whom the Turis formed a small minority, that they put up with it.

Most of the Kurram posts were on craggy hilltops, accessible only by mule or on foot. The most common 'incident' was a fracas between Sunni and Shiah, usually corrected by billeting a Sunni platoon on an offending Shiah village or vice versa. Every year there were cases of minor robbery or lorry-shooting, but nothing on the Waziristan scale. The Militia had a few casualties, for example when men returning from a course or leave-details were shot up on the road; occasionally they went out against Orakzai, Zaimukht or Khostwal raiders. It was quite an event when the garrison of Lakka Tiga post (one and a half platoons) was attacked by a lashkar, or when the Para Chamkannis shot up the Political Agent's Jirga and had to be seen off by a Militia gasht. In 1930 the Kurram Militia actually suffered thirty-four casualties in tribal skirmishes and the Viceroy granted them a bonus of one month's pay for all ranks; but most of the fighting done by this fine corps after 1919 was when from time to time they sent detachments to help the Tochi Scouts and the SWS. However, they did the job for which they were raised. Parachinar could turn out in half an hour a formidable little army, eighty horse, five hundred foot, two guns. Ian McHarg, their Commandant, found the sight of this column operating against the background of the snowy 15,000 feet Safed Koh one to stir the blood.

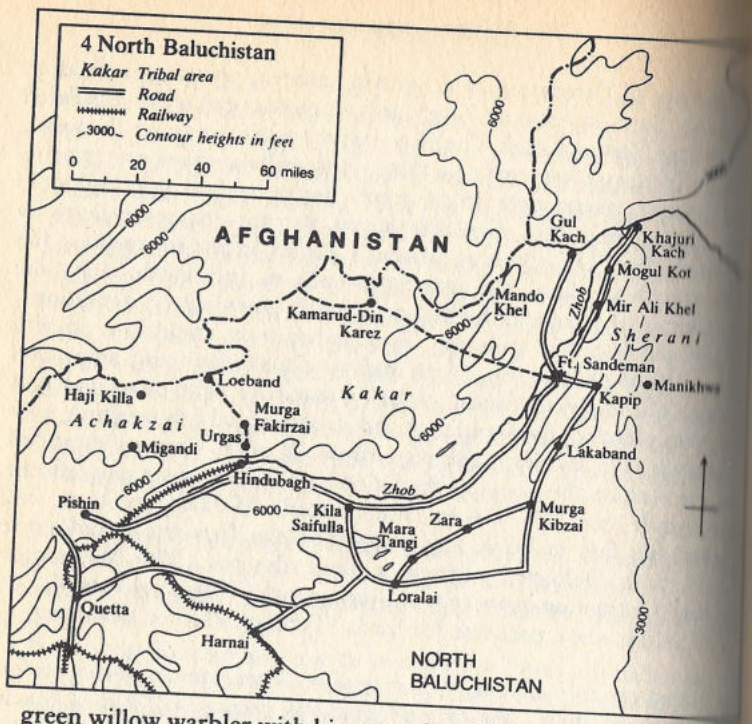
There were, for British officers, compensations for the quiet life.

The climate of Parachinar is delightful; officers' wives and children could live there. It lies on a long, shaly slope overlooked by the Safed Koh and the Peiwar Kotal. The Government station is above the town, and its fruit and vegetable gardens. Everywhere there are streams from the mountains, nourishing great chenar, walnut and mulberry trees. Every fruit and vegetable seems to grow twice as large as anywhere else. The Quarter Master's duties included keeping the tennis courts verdant, the asparagus-beds in full production, the swimming-pool clean and the Brahmini milch-cows in good condition,.

There was excellent shooting. Four or five guns could pick up fifty brace a day of chikor, sisi, black and grey partridge, teal, snipe and mallard. The mahseer fishing, with fly-spoon or light plug, was first class, with plenty of two-pounders and an occasional fish weighing over five pounds. Ian McHarg, a skiing enthusiast, when Commandant had built a ski-hut on the slopes of the Safed Koh. There was a magnificent thirteen-mile run. They were often, recalls McHarg, shot at, but travelled too fast to be in any danger; so the frustrated marksmen relieved their feelings by burning down the hut. The MI ponies supplied the traction-power for ski-joring round Parachinar itself.

The valley was a paradise for birds. Terence Phillips describes

the most exciting day for birds in my life. There was an osprey on the lower Taida jheel. My orderly instantly recognised it as a Mach Khorak, an Eater of Fish, so it must be quite common. There were at least two hundred Harriers, mostly on the lower Taida. Half of these were Marsh Harriers of both sexes, old and young birds, all mixed. There were a good many Pallid Harriers, but more Montagues, a beautiful bird. It was very dark and an overcast day, and there were thousands of Kulan [cranes] flying up the valley in their great clanging formations and, finding the pass blocked by cloud, coming back down again. In the evening the light was very bad but just enough to see a hundred wagtails, nearly all yellow-headed but a few grey-headed with their yellow throats and very dark grey, almost black in the light crowns and still darker cheeks. There were some indeterminate greeny-grey females which I have been unable to identify, though they were very tame. Stonechats were very common and there were a few Rufous Backed Shrikes and I saw one King Crow. As I crossed the river a flight of eight terns, big and gull-like and seeming all white except for one which I saw had a black cap, passed over me. These and the wagtails are the only birds seen today which I cannot identify. The boy I had left to watch the car had shot a



green willow warbler with his catapult, which was a new bird to me. As I came back I came on a hundred white storks in the trees by the roadside and they sat still as I passed only ten yards away.

The Baluchistan Politicals were usually out of step with their colleagues across the Gumal. They did things differently and, they thought, better. Whether the comparative placidity of Baluchistan, up to 1919, was the cause or the effect of the success of Sir Robert Sandeman's policy of indirect rule right up to the Durand Line, was much debated – probably a bit of both. Certainly the tribal authorities in Baluchistan had more control over their people than the Waziristan Maliks; and the country was more open, more friendly to regular forces than to guerillas. (See Map 4.)

After the collapse of Sandeman's system in Zhob, the Baluchistan Politicals in 1920 looked at their private army and came to a conclusion exactly the opposite to that reached by the Waziristan Politicals. The Annual Report for 1919–20 recorded:

> The old corps had been altogether too highly organised and its objects misconceived. Drill, discipline, uniform, training had been introduced, which were foreign to the whole spirit of the tough

tribesmen who formed its rank-and-file. Standards of efficiency were set up which were neither desirable nor capable of achievement in an irregular corps, and which robbed it of what was much more important, initiative and mobility. The object now aimed at is to have a homogeneous body of men irregular in fact as well as in name, loosely disciplined but mobile, incapable of forming fours but thoroughly acquainted with the country and its people, able to move as silently and rapidly as the raiders they are out to catch. The tribes who proved failures in the 1919 débâcle have been removed, and their places taken by Brahuis and Baluchis. There are still a large number of Orakzais in the corps. But as time goes on it is hoped that this foreign element will disappear . . . There is no need for a body of foreign mercenaries in Zhob.

It did not work out that way. The new Zhob Militia* was composed of five British officers and 1,200 tribesmen, organised into two companies of Brahuis, one of Baluchis, one of Pishin Kakars, two of Orakzais, one of mixed North West Frontier Province Pathans, and two troops of Mounted Infantry. Nearly twenty years later the Orakzais were still the backbone of the corps. In uniform, discipline, organisation and training it became very like the Waziristan corps. Nothing else would suffice in the situation in Zhob in 1919–20.

Before May 1919, the Zhob Militia had held ten posts besides Fort Sandeman. All but two were evacuated or surrendered to the tribesmen while the loose administration collapsed like a house of cards – the local officials demoralised, the Jirgas ceasing to function, the tribal Sardars and Maliks sitting on the fence. A year later, after the murder of his predecessor, Major R. H. Chenevix Trench took over as Political Agent, Zhob.

He found that there was still no functioning administration: conditions were just like those in the Tribal Territory of Waziristan. Jirgas were making no attempt to re-establish their authority, the local officials were still demoralised, the Sardars and Maliks still sitting on the fence. Not a rupee of revenue had been collected for a year – financially of no significance because the revenue from Zhob was small, but a barometer of the efficiency of the administration.

The brightest feature of a gloomy scene was the Zhob Militia under Captains G. A. R. Spain and N. L. St P. Bunbury. Except for the

* After the débâcle in 1919 the Zhob Militia was renamed the Zhob Levy Corps, but soon reverted to the old name of Zhob Militia. So, let us call it the Zhob Militia throughout.

Baluch and Brahui companies, it was up to strength; over seven hundred recruits had been trained during a year in which it saw less more action than the SWS, Tochi Scouts and Kurram Militia combined. After its deserters had departed and its Ghilzai company had been disbanded, it had acquitted itself very well, and it was now ready to take on more responsibilities, especially the posts which had been lost a year earlier, not only in Zhob but in parts of Pishin and Loralai districts.

In the autumn of 1920 the Zhob Column, a brigade group, ventured for the first time in a year to Mir Ali Khel. From there the Brigadier, Political Agent, half-a-dozen officers and a troop of Mounted Infantry rode on to the Moghul Kot and back. Their route was piqueted at half-way and they chanced the rest, sighting no Wazirs. Mogul Kot was littered with split cartridge cases, from Major Russell's firing of the magazine. On their return they were shown the place where Burn, Murdoch, Traill, Leese and MacCorstie were said to be buried, and the place in the dry river-bed where Reilly had been killed. The bones of his horse were there, but his remains must have been washed away in a spate. Shortly after this, the Militia took over the two posts again.

It now remained to restore the loose administration and, as a pre-requisite, some semblance to law and order. There were three over-lapping obstacles: (a) The Wazirs; (b) the Suliman Khel, nearly as tough and nasty as Wazirs, migrating through the Zhob twice a year on their way between Afghanistan and India; and (c) local hostiles of the Sherani, Mando Khel and Kakar tribes, including Militia deserters.

The locals were the first to weaken. One by one, on safe conduct, the leading hostiles came into Fort Sandeman to negotiate their return to house, home and respectability. 'It goes against the grain', wrote Trench, 'to let them off scot-free, but after all the object is a return to normal.' It does not seem to have gone much against his grain. One outlaw, 'a cheerful knave, touched me for 200 rupees and a camel. As a proof of his good feeling, he told me he had me in his sights twice in ten days, but refrained from squeezing the trigger.' Another gave the Political Agent a beautifully embroidered, astrakhan-trimmed posteen. It would not be seemly, he said, to come empty-handed. People began to resort to law. An early litigant was a reformed Sherani outlaw who in the heady days of 1919 had bought from a plausible Mullah an amulet guaranteed to deflect bullets from the wearer. To try it out, he tied it round the neck of his favourite fighting cock, took careful aim and blew the unfortunate bird to pieces. He now complained to the Political Agent that the Mullah had taken his money under false pretences.

Trench advised him to seek redress from the Jirga which, with its new-found confidence, awarded him substantial damages against the man of God.

The Suliman Khel gave more trouble. In 1921 they killed an American geologist and they massacred a caravan of Nasars, another Powindah tribe and their hereditary enemies. Trench with a Militia Mounted Infantry escort found the Nasar corpses. It was not a pretty sight: 'the Suliman Khel had gone out of their way to be unpleasant.' In March 1921, a hundred Suliman Khel raided the chrome mines at Hindubagh, getting away with 250 camels. The chiga party from the Militia post followed, a pekinese pursuing a mastiff, and managed to shoot a couple before the raiders crossed the Afghan border. Worst of all, a lashkar of eight hundred to a thousand Suliman Khel, Wazirs and Kharots spent eleven days in British territory hunted by three columns of regular troops and Militia; they stole hundreds of cattle and camels, looted several villages, and got clear away. In a private letter Trench wrote, 'A little *suppressio veri* is necessary to keep on good terms with the soldiers, but the naked truth is that the raiders were never hustled out of a walk.' In a rugged, roadless country the three columns, with no wireless communication, were looking for a needle in a haystack.

Besides these misdeeds, the Suliman Khel owed thousands of rupees for their misdemeanours in 1919, and had no intention of paying. Their caravans kept well clear of Fort Sandeman and the Militia posts. Trench's Assistant Political Agent, Khan Bahadur Sherbet Khan, an Afridi, came up with the answer. The richest of the Suliman Khel were not in Zhob at all, but in Calcutta, lending money (in defiance of the Prophet's injunctions) to the mild Hindus, to whom their annual visit, to extract ruinous interest with the dagger and a heavy iron-bound cudgel, was a time of terror. It was arranged with the Calcutta police that they should arrest the most eminent and send them up to jail in Fort Sandeman, there to remain until the tribe paid its dues. 'Imagine the disgust of these rich merchants of Calcutta', wrote Trench, 'I have a dozen in jail. We are very good pals. I tell them they are my guests: meat, tobacco, good food and no work. Their protestations of innocence and promises to settle if they are allowed back to their sections would melt a heart of stone!' Sherbet's device was within the letter of the Frontier Crimes Regulations, but perhaps not quite what its framers had envisaged.

Trench reinforced the Hindubagh area and told the Militia they could have 'the rifles, money, clothes, boots etc. of any raiders they may lay out. The resultant increase in keenness is very marked. "Even if it is

a magazine-rifle, Sahib?" The price of a good magazine-rifle is equal to three years' pay, or the price of a wife.'

The chief object was to get the local tribes to defend themselves and help the Militia against the raiders. They would do so willingly, said the Sherani Maliks, if the Sarkar would give them magazine-rifles, but they had only Martinis. 'The Wazirs, Sahib, allow no one to bring a Martini on a raid.' But matters were slowly improving. In June 1921, a man came running into Fort Sandeman with news of a Suliman Khel gang in a village only eight miles away. The Militia chiga troop rode off but only twenty rifles: all the rest of the Mounted Infantry were on a gasht. However the Sherani Jirga was in session, which enabled Trench to put it to them that this was their chance to show their worth. 'They responded with alacrity, law-givers and litigants alike. Within a few minutes the court had broken up and sixty Sheranis, some mounted and some on foot but all with rifles, were following hard on the Militia's heels.'

The Suliman Khel purged their past offences, realising that the time of unbridled licence was past. The Wazirs did not. The Amir of Afghanistan, in order to de-stabilise the Baluchistan border, settled seven hundred Wazir families, 'real die-hards, with a bitter hatred of us, every man and boy with a ·303 Lee Enfield magazine rifle,' at Shahjui, across the Durand Line north of Hindubagh. From this sanctuary, immune to retaliation and too far away for easy surveillance, they were ideally placed to cross the border anywhere in six hundred miles.

Trench heard that they had killed a Veterinary Officer and cut up a company of the 92nd Punjabis on its way to relieve the besieged Zhob Militia post at Haji Killa, in Pishin district. (In Waziristan no one in his senses would move a single company about like this.) As the Zhob Militia were involved, and the Political Agent, Pishin was at the far end of the district, Trench drove to Pishin, picked up some Militia and riding camels, and hastened to the scene of the fight. They met six wounded and naked Punjabis who had been released by the raiders, gave them their camels and continued on foot. Then they met eight more, sent them back on horses borrowed from a village, and resumed the hopeless chase. They learned that the company had run into three to four hundred Wazirs and put up a good fight until the two British officers were killed, when the Wazirs rushed the survivors. Forty Punjabis were killed, twenty captured and eighty rifles lost: a first-class disaster. The prisoners were stripped and made to carry the Wazir wounded to safety. Then the Sikhs were decapitated and the Moslems released, naked, to make their way home. The lashkar summoned the

Militia post at Haji Killa to surrender, but the Subadar in command told them to go to the devil, and they went on across the border into Afghanistan.

In March 1922, Trench temporarily took over Pishin district, expecting it to be a soft posting. Within a few days of his arrival there, at six thirty in the evening, in came Lieutenant-Colonel Boswell [not his real name], commanding a Punjabi battalion, with news that five of his officers had gone off chikor-shooting that morning and only three had returned. These said they had been fired at while walking up birds in line; they had lost touch with the other two, but had made their way to their car and got away, which was probably the best they could do with only shot-guns against rifles. 'Anything more insane than to go out without a rifle or two among them, I can't imagine', commented Trench. 'Added to this, they had been warned there were raiders hanging about the area, and had actually been ordered not to go there.'

Trench, Boswell and forty Punjabis piled into lorries and drove hard for Migandi where the incident had occurred.

> It was bitterly cold, freezing hard and a cruel wind. But we reached Migandi by ten o'clock in spite of a bad road, numerous breakdowns and practically no lights. I then knocked up some villagers who told us that the raiders, about a dozen in number, had passed through their village late in the evening with two officers as prisoners. They gave me a scribbled note from the latter, Smith and Jones [not their real names], to the effect that they were unhurt and that their captors were prepared to let them go if I released and sent to Haji Killa certain men whom I had in jail. They also laid down other terms on a liberal scale! The leader of the raiders was one Nadir who has come into prominence during the last year. Well, there was obviously nothing to be done at Migandi. The raiders had a three-hour start and might have been anywhere in the hills to the north. It was pitch-dark and quite impossible to follow their tracks. So we started back and reached Pishin, half-frozen in spite of posteens, at one o'clock, I spent most of the night waking up people in Quetta with 'Clear the Line' wires. It gave me a quiet satisfaction!

Meanwhile the Tahsildar at Pishin, hearing from another source a garbled version of the affair, had sent word to a troop of Militia under Risaldar Khairo Khan, Kakar, telling him if possible to cut the raiders off.

Next day the Agent to the Governor General, Sir Armine Dew,

arrived and fairly blew his top. Not merely had the five idiots disobeyed direct orders, but they were poaching, for chikor-shooting in that area had been closed for a year. Meanwhile Trench had gathered in various headmen of Nadir's tribe.

> There were only two courses open. We could either accept the raiders' terms, in which case it would be next to impossible to run the show in future, or we could put up a bluff. Dew decided – and I think rightly – on the latter. His main and immediate object is to get back the two British officers safe and sound, but he also has to consider the province. So we selected half-a-dozen of the most influential Maliks of Nadir's tribe, put the fear of death into them and sent them off this afternoon with orders to go to Haji Killa, get into touch with the raiders and tell the latter that unless they returned the prisoners unhurt, their relatives would swing, their villages be burnt and their tribe ruined. I never saw men more frightened.

Dew left for Quetta, and half-an-hour later a special messenger arrived from Risaldar Khairo Khan to say that he and local villagers had come up with the raiders, killed Nadir and were continuing the pursuit. What was he to do with Nadir's body?

> Khairo Khan has done splendidly, but one does not know whether to be glad or sorry. It all depends on whether any relative of Nadir is in the gang. If he is, he will kill Smith and Jones. It's beyond our control now . . . I had the best reason to suppose that Nadir and his gang, under the indirect pressure I was putting on him by incarcerating his relatives, would have come in in three or four days, when the folly of Boswell's officers presents him with a card beyond his wildest hopes!

When the raiders started shooting, Smith and Jones had become separated from their companions whom they saw making off in the car. They had no choice but to surrender.

> The raiders relieved them of their guns, assured them they were not Wazirs and that they were not going to be killed. They all then trekked up north across the hills for the Barshore valley, going hard until the morning. The raiders gave the prisoners the best of their food, a blanket apiece and an ox to ride on, and were much amused that they had come out to shoot and had themselves been pinched.

During the day Nadir and two others left the road to look up friends in a village. While he was there, up came Khairo Khan and his troop and shot Nadir dead. The rest of the gang pushed on until four in the afternoon when, reckoning they had outdistanced pursuit, they stopped at a house for refreshment.

> Three very comely young women in it made tea for captors and captives alike, all sitting (girls included) chock-a-block round a fire to drink it. While they were refreshing themselves, Khairo Khan and his MI came up and started firing through the door and roof at 200–300 yards' range. One of the girls who had a small baby went and hid among the cows, but the others merely moved out of the line of fire. The raiders then turned ugly and were about to shoot S and J when a local man rushed in between them with a Koran. He was dashed to the ground, but Smith and Jones guaranteed the raiders' lives and liberty if their own lives were spared. The raiders agreed, but made them sign a bond for 2,000 rupees before they were allowed to leave the hut and get Khairo Khan's lot to cease fire. They had difficulty in inducing KK to do so because he wanted to mop up the whole gang. A short parley followed, after which Smith and Jones with their rescuers made off, leaving the gang in possession of their shotguns and the field!

It was with marked reluctance that Trench paid 2,000 rupees to the raiders' emissary a few days later.

By the end of 1922 there was a visible improvement, thanks largely to the Zhob Militia. There were still a few small raids, by Wazirs, not local tribesmen, but the locals were passing information in to the Political Agent and the Militia forts. Maliks were bringing their disputes to Fort Sandeman, and were accepting tribal responsibility for law and order. Even the light taxes were being collected by junior officials who could move safely around with a small escort.

By the mid-1920s Zhob was at peace. The Militia gashted about the district and piqueted for the Zhob column on excursions to the Gumal River and the Afghan border. They had occasional trouble from the Suliman Khel, and sometimes an outlaw took pot-shots at a lorry. Most gashts were very different from those in Waziristan – leisurely circuits of the outposts taking from four to fourteen days, with baggage camels and furtive assignations with five-rupee informers whose news was always weeks out of date. Occasionally they were sniped from afar, but they had no real fighting. Zhob became a sort of addiction for many

Political and Militia Officers, though it is difficult to see wherein lay its charm. Geoffrey Hawkins said that his three years as a Wing Officer in the Zhob Militia there were the happiest in his whole service.

> I enjoyed the change from regular soldiering . . . six officers commanding 2,400 men, instead of fifteen officers commanding five according to the rule-books. Then there was the land, so unattractive yet encouraging you to explore it. It was hot. It was cold. It rose up in long scrawls of hills and then settled down. You had to fight it, and when you did, you appreciated each other. It held about two humans to the square mile. Villages, far apart, hid themselves in cracks in the earth, valleys in which were small, mud-walled patches of green where grapes and apricots grew. It was a country of silence, except sometimes for the sound of the wind. And you went where you wished, except over the Border.

There was polo on the gravelly maidan below the rocky hill on which perched Sandeman's Fort. There were wonderful chikor shoots with lines of Militia beaters driving the birds fast as grouse over the guns swinging round the spurs and over the gurgura bushes. There was good mahseer fishing in the Zhob river; the *gud*, the wild sheep of the Frontier, could be found on many mountains; and officers with abundant energy and a head for heights could stalk straight-horned markhor on the precipices of the Takht-i-Suliman, and descend gingerly to the narrow ledge where Solomon had landed his magic carpet to allow his Indian bride a last look at her home.

The tough boys of the South Waziristan Scouts and the Tochi Scouts used to say that the Kurram Militia was the life of a country gentleman, and the Zhob Militia the life of a *retired* country gentleman. To which the Kurram and the Zhob might have retorted, 'In so far as your statement has any validity, it is because we, in the early 1920s, won our wars, making the Kurram and the Zhob too hot for hostiles. You are still fighting yours – not, if we may say so, with conspicuous success.'

8

The Scouts at Home

The fort at Jandola, completed in 1923, housed the headquarters of the South Waziristan Scouts: one Wing Headquarters, thirteen Infantry platoons and one troop of Mounted Infantry. Officers from the other Wings (based on Sararogha and Sarwekai) resorted to its Officers' Mess on average about once a month for two or three days.

Jandola is on the Mahsud-Bhitanni border, in a country of arid hills. From the outside it resembled a mediaeval castle with loopholed, crenellated walls some fifteen feet high, towers at each corner from which attackers could be enfiladed and another tower over the massive gate. The walls enclosed a space of rather more than an acre: inside, backing on to the walls, were the British and Pathan Officers' Messes and quarters, and barrack rooms and the armoury, quartermaster's stores and other offices.

The Messes and living quarters looked on to a well-watered lawn. There was a red-flowered pepper-tree, a gorgeous powder-blue flowered jacaranda outside the British Officers' Mess, a miniature box-hedge and climbing roses. Outside the walls were the triangular, walled tahsil where the Pathan Tahsildar held court. It was usually crammed with litigants, five-rupee informers, and hostages held as security for someone's good behaviour. (After residing in Jandola for a few weeks, a hostage was usually replaced by some other member of the family.) Outside too were the Mounted Infantry horse-lines and the motor transport park and workshop, protected by lower walls against snipers. Nearby was the mud fort of Old Jandola, converted into a civil hospital.

'Stanley Pip', wrote Denis Ambrose, 'was a great gardener, so we became gardeners too.' The gardens, some six acres, lay between the fort and the Tank Zam. There were grown in abundance peaches, apricots, pomegranates, and many kinds of vegetables. Supervised by any British and Pathan officers who were interested, with unlimited labour and any amount of manure from the horses and the 130-strong dairy herd, it would have been discreditable if the gardens had not been a success. Garden work was popular with the men, as was garden produce. Among the gardens was a tiny officers' swimming pool and two grass tennis courts. Jandola, only 2,300 feet above sea-level, was hot in summer, but all this greenery made it bearable. Water for the fort and the gardens was pumped up from the Tank Zam. The pump-house, wired and booby-trapped, could have been the Achilles heel of Jandola, but was never actually sabotaged. To discourage long-range sniping, there were two stone-built piquet-towers, on ridges about a mile away to east and west.

The basic building was done by the Sappers and Miners, but the corps was responsible for many improvements and extensions, especially after it was discovered that good bricks could be baked from the local clay. The Akora Khattak platoons produced many good masons, bricklayers and carpenters; when cement was difficult to obtain, they made lime from a special kind of grey rock.

Like the gardens, the Officers' Mess was the creation of Major S. P. Williams. It consisted of ante-room, dining-room, card-room and billiards-room, with the 'usual offices'. Other rooms might keep to military tradition – leather arm-chairs, shikar-trophies, captured weapons and corps photographs – but Williams made the ante-room, known more appropriately as the drawing-room, the greatest possible contrast; its chintzes and water-colours, its luscious brunette over the mantelpiece, afforded a real relief after weeks in a lonely outpost. The drawing-room, dining-room and card-room were inviolate: parties were confined to the billiards-room. Denis Ambrose describes the scene:

> On a guest night (which occurred whenever we had a guest) Stanley Pip, slightly deaf, would be seated in the drawing-room reading and sipping a weak whisky-soda, quite oblivious to the pandemonium in the billiards-room, with billiard balls hurtling through the air in energetic fives and crashes of broken window-panes, accompanied by a piano and bawdy songs. Next morning as a routine procedure the glass would be swept up before breakfast and the panes replaced by

the ever-helpful sapper. Although parties frequently carried on to 3 a.m., they were never allowed to interfere with the 6 o'clock gasht next morning, the most effective medicine for very thick heads.

The Jandola Mess acquired a reputation for hospitality and guests were numerous. Among the earliest, in 1924, were a party of VIPs including Sir Alfred Mond, Chairman of ICI, and Lord Inchcape, Chairman of the P & O Line, touring India during the cold weather. The Scouts decided that something special should be laid on for them, such as a 'typical' Frontier outrage. So some slightly puzzled Mahsuds, who had hitherto been forcibly dissuaded from anything of the sort, were paid five rupees each to fire a few shots over the Mess roof during dinner. All through the meal bullets cracked and ricochets whirred overhead, to the manifest delight of these eminent persons, who felt they would have something to dine out on in Belgravia. A good time was had by all, except for the sole casualty, an unfortunate donkey.

Another early visitor to Jandola was Lawrence of Arabia, in the guise of Aircraftsman Shaw, benighted there by a broken-down truck and accommodated in the Officers' Mess. He capped their tales of rifle-thieves, kept them enthralled by tales (some, perhaps, almost true) of far Arabia, and left them a volume which is still treasured by the SWS officers.

> This book [he inscribed on the fly-leaf] was written by me, but its sordid type and squalid blocks are the responsibility of the publisher. It is, however, the last copy in print of *Revolt in the Desert*, and I have much pleasure in presenting it to the officers of the South Waziristan Scouts in memory of a very interesting day and night with them. T. E. Shaw.

The Anglican chaplain from Razmak used to hold services in the ante-room. Nat Cosby, who like many Irish Protestants may have regarded church-going as an occasion for showing the flag rather than religious devotion, issued orders at an 'O Group' the evening before. 'This is a parade, and all officers will attend. What's more you'll all open your mouths and sing: you can sing loud enough, God knows, on Guest Nights. Except you lot.' (indicating the Papists and Presbyterians) 'You'll fall in in the rear rank and keep quiet.' He greatly disapproved of 'smells and bells'. When a High Church padre took the service, and kept on darting into the card-room and emerging with a different hat on, Cosby's comments were very hurtful. The Catholic chaplain came less

frequently, especially after one of his flock, Horace Draycott, who was painfully shy, made a dash for cover on his arrival, muttering to Sandy Sandison, 'Tell him I've had to go on a gasht.' But two Jesuits stayed for weeks compiling a Flora of Waziristan. No doubt, being Jesuits, they had no difficulty in integrating: they probably went out on gashts.

Food was as good as could be expected: poor beef, delicious mutton from the Frontier fat-tailed sheep, plenty of fresh vegetables and fruit and as many luxuries as they could afford. Most of the officers drank a good deal – beer, whisky, gin and champagne whenever a celebration was called for, which was as often as possible. In Jandola this was an antidote to the hard life outside: they all needed it, some needed it more than others.

There were other Mess entertainments besides billiard-fives. (Were proper billiards and snooker ever played?) Trick revolver-shooting kept the 'ever-helpful sapper' busy next morning – but not, more by luck than judgment, the 'ever-helpful doctor'. Ambrose records that

> fire-blowing became very popular. This consisted of filling one's mouth with paraffin and spewing it out over a lighted match, producing a long flame. One night young Boulter was performing this fascinating trick when he hicupped in the middle of it, causing the flame to blow inwards instead of outwards. He was in hospital for three weeks with singed lungs.

A visitor, offered a drink by Haggis Gardyne, would observe his host taking a drink too, and then nonchalantly chewing up and swallowing the glass. M. J. O'Connor was a member of the Magic Circle, enlivening many a difficult Jirga by producing an egg from a Malik's beard, or a lighted cigarette from his ear. His most celebrated coup was getting four senior officers playing bridge, after dinner, with fourteen cards each: they never noticed. Geoffrey Keating would clear the floor and, to the music of the gramophone, dance ballet. He was a most competent performer – entrechats, fouettés, pirouettes, the lot. He was part-Russian, and during the Second World War became one of Churchill's Russian interpreters. Denis Ambrose, while himself preferring Beethoven, Mozart and Chopin, could whack merry hell out of a piano; he and three others made up a hot jazz-band, piano, drum, trumpet and guitar, but, alas, no girls to dance to it. FitzMaurice and Felix Williams had fine voices, specialising in Irish and Welsh songs respectively. Fitz's *Me Mother-in-law* and Felix Williams's *One Meal*

Ball, in the early hours of the morning after a guest night, were things to remember.

Sir Philip Chetwode, Commander-in-Chief, India, visited Jandola as a guest; he had, it must be remembered, no authority over Scouts. Late in the evening FitzMaurice gave a spirited rendering of *The Croppy Boy*, followed by more seditious Republican songs. He then turned to the C-in-C with a genial smile and said, 'Now you can court-martial me if you could, but you can't, can you?' The C-in-C acknowledged that he would if he could but he couldn't.

Officers' quarters – a bedroom and a bathroom each – had, of course, no electric light, electric fan, pull-plug or running water. Instead there were hurricane- and pressure-lamps, the bhisti with his water-skin, and the sweeper hovering in the background with bucket and broom.

Sanitation was a problem. In the early days it was by what was euphemistically known as 'tribal custom' – i.e. the men going out in the early morning to the nearby bushes and nullahs. This was not insanitary – the sun soon dried it up – but it was hardly safe: a Scout engaged in the earliest business of the day was a squatting target. And it was certainly not suitable for posts with garrisons of two or three hundred. So during the 1920s post-sanitation was modernised. There were bucket-latrines inside the walls for use at night, and deep-drop latrines, outside the walls but protected from sniping, to which the men resorted in a rush in the early morning.

There was a Commandant of the Tochi Scouts to whom all this unused compost was a challenge. The best stuff in the world, wasted! Think what those clever Chinese would have done with it! Should it not be spread on the vegetable gardens? But the Pathan is very fastidious in these matters, and the thing must be managed with care. It was obviously a matter to be delegated to the Quartermaster, who at the time was Captain Mohamad Sharif, a burly Kuki Khel Afridi, one of the first trans-Frontier Pathans to hold the King's Commission. So 'Sharifo' was told to get on with it.

After prayerful thought (for there might well be trouble) he decided that the business had better be done by the Kuki Khel platoon, his own tribe, supervised by himself. All went well. The oldest latrine-trench was first opened up; the contents were quite unobjectionable, a fine, friable compost with no smell at all. Then suddenly the man at the bottom of the trench flung down his shovel and exclaimed the Pushtu equivalent of 'I'll soldier no more!'

Sharifo drew a deep breath. This was the moment of truth. Any

mishandling of the situation by himself might produce mass-disobedience, even mutiny. The Frontier in flames from one end to the other and he responsible for it!

'Why?' he asked, with a calm he was far from feeling.

'Not with this bloody shovel. It's the one we use for stirring the pilau.'

The Quartermaster's main job was, of course, not the gardens, but the procurement and issue of all rations and equipment. Except for arms and ammunition, everything was obtained through civilian contractors. Victor Wainwright, when Quartermaster of the Tochi Scouts, was advised never to negotiate with a contractor unless his shorthand clerk was in the room next door, head in a wall-cupboard, notebook and pencil ready. It was a precaution which more than once proved its worth in dealings with local and minor entrepreneurs. But the permanent Corps Contractors (one to each corps) were Hindus of the utmost integrity. To obviate delay in the payment of Mess-bills by officers who might be beleaguered in outposts, the Corps Contractor drew all their pay and allowances, settled their bills and credited the balance (if any) to their private bank accounts.

The Scouts' posts needed a great deal of firewood, which was brought in by local contractors, piled in heaps outside the barbed wire, from time to time weighed in enormous scales, and the contractors paid. One dark night the sentry at Jandola heard the sound of heavy movement and called the Pathan Orderly Officer. After listening for a while, they realised that the contractor was busy moving wood from the pile that was weighed and paid for, on to the unweighed pile, so that it would be paid for again. The sentry, young and bloodthirsty, wished to discourage this enterprise with a grenade, but the Orderly Officer thought this might be over-reacting, and told him to do nothing to interrupt the work. Next morning a fatigue party reversed the process – transferring nearly all the 'unweighed' pile of wood to the weighed, and paid for, side. When the contractor returned for his money, he marked with expressionless face the huge pile of wood for which he had supposedly been paid, the mini-heap for which he might now expect payment, the smiles of the Scouts – and made no comment.

Hockey was the principal Indian Army game, though Gurkhas preferred Association football. But hockey was not suitable for Scouts: it was too difficult, in stone- and shale-country, to produce a smooth, mud-and-cowdung hockey pitch. So S. P. Williams made football and basketball the main SWS games. Any number of men could kick a ball

about any level space, and basketball could, if necessary, be played inside the walls of a post, uninterrupted by sniping. Scouts basketball was an extremely rough game; being tackled by a bony and exuberant Pathan was as bad as being tackled by an Irish Rugby international, and cost more than one officer a broken rib or collar-bone. Scouts football was marked more by vigour than by science and was not really up to good Gurkha standards, but Scouts liked sharpening up their game against Gurkhas and British troops. Jemadar Mukhamed, Orakzai, tough as old boots, became very friendly with Jemadar Bhim Sing of the 4th Gurkhas, another all-out competitor on the football field. They would go at one another hammer-and-tongs for ninety minutes, then finish up with a warm embrace and gurgles of delight. After a particularly hard match, a beaming Mukhamed announced to his Wing Commander, 'Bhim Sing will dine with us tonight – provided none of his people know.' It was unheard of for a Gurkha, indeed for any Hindu, to eat with Scouts, so strict secrecy had to be preserved. Bhim Sing and Captain H. R. 'Hutch' Hutchins sampled together the produce of Scotland, which is, of course, forbidden to Moslems, and then had a rare old evening with the Pathan officers.

Football served a more Machiavellian purpose. The Subadar Major allowed the local boys to use the ground and casual questioning by a friendly Scout, with a handful of sweets, often paid dividends. 'How's your uncle Mahmud, Ali?' 'He hasn't been home for ages.' 'Staying with his cousin in Makin, I suppose.' 'Oh, no, they're not friends these days.'

On the lawn in front of the Jandola Mess croquet was played. The Pathan officers took delightedly to this vicious and vindictive game. Soon they were up to all the dodges, legitimate and otherwise, and argued heatedly the finer points of a pastime usually associated with vicarage garden-parties.

The most prestigious sport, of obvious military value, was the *khud*-race, five or six miles of the roughest possible going, up and down almost precipitous slopes.

For officers there was tennis twice a week, always on different days and at different times, after a patrol had searched the maize- and sugar-cane fields within rifle range.

For the men a popular entertainment was Khattak dancing. The sword-dance, to the wild music of drums and pipes, with blades flashing, full white shirts swirling and the young men's bobbed hair tossed back and forward, was one of the sights of the Frontier.

The Mulagoris were great singers, musicians and bird-fanciers. A Mulagori Scout would often be seen walking out in the evening

followed by his tame chikor, or bouncing up and down in his hand, to strengthen its leg-muscles, his favourite fighting quail. A Mulagee leave-party was always unmistakeable – singing, and its lorry festooned with bird-cages.

Miranshah, the home of the Tochi Scouts, had much the same atmosphere as Jandola, but it was an older fort, its gardens were longer established, producing delicious grapes. It lay in an open plain, separated from the villages and cultivated fields along the Tochi river. Food, amenities and entertainments were much the same as in the SWS.

The well-watered lawn was always green, and kept so by successive generations of captive Demoiselle cranes which consumed the wire worms, leatherjackets and other enemies of green grass. However they exercised a reign of terror over the officers' dogs, even the bull-terriers backing away from their dagger-like beaks. A new-broom Commandant expelled them from the garden. Promptly the lawn became covered with unsightly brown patches; the Demoiselle cranes were brought back and the dogs had to put up with them.

The fort at Miranshah was bigger than Jandola, because it included within the perimeter wall the Political Agent's office and house, and a RAF flight with hangars, workshop, British officers' and Other Ranks' quarters and Messes. The RAF had its own compound, but there was a short cut between the Scouts' and the RAF Officers' Messes up an iron ladder, over a flat roof and down another ladder. This occasionally presented problems after Guest Nights, as in 'Operation Prender' when John Prendergast of the Tochi, weighing at least seventeen stone, had to be carried back to his quarters after dining with the RAF. It was explained to the Scouts sentry, staring fixedly to his front, that the Sahib had been suddenly taken ill – quite a reasonable cover-story until the Sahib himself blew it by bursting into a loud but tuneful rendering of *Come, Landlord fill the flowing bowl*. The suspicion then dawned on his devoted and exhausted bearers that they had been had. The Scouts subalterns so impressed a newly-posted Medical Officer about the danger from snipers (in fact, negligible in Miranshah) that he used to crawl across the flat roof on hands and knees.

The Politicals usually messed with the Scouts. One Assistant Political Agent wore a kilt at dinner, so a light-fingered Scouts subaltern crawled under the table during a festive occasion and unfastened the buckles which held it up. Rising to the Loyal Toast, the Assistant Political Agent was revealed to the scandalised Mess waiters as a true Scot.

The Tochi Scouts, on the whole, had a more varied social life than the

SWS. The delights of Bannu, Kohat and Peshawar were comparatively accessible, while for the SWS civilisation consisted of two Mission nurses and the Political Agent's family in Tank, reputedly the third hottest place in the world. Miranshah had a better climate than Jandola, drier and cooler. There was a squash-court as well as tennis-courts. And the Tochi played polo, while the SWS took the austere view that if the Mounted Infantry ponies played polo, they would inevitably be bought with a view to polo rather than gashting. It was mainly a British officers' game, but some of the Mounted Infantry were keen and dashing players.

When the Army re-occupied Wana in 1929, the SWS detachment there could ride with the Wana Drag Hunt, 8½ couple, which hunted twice a week in the protected area. Occasionally they got on to a jackal which took them further afield, but the local Wazirs generally had the good feeling not to shoot at them. The Mounted Infantry of both corps went in for tent-pegging, a favourite sport of eastern horsemen, though it was not good for the horses, giving them a taste for tearaway galloping in a straight line.

Both North and South Waziristan offered fairly good shooting, when and where it was safe to shoot without being shot at: chikor, sisi, duck, snipe and an occasional woodcock. The Dhana chikor shoot, on the plain west of Wana, was an annual event. In 1930 it was well and truly shot up, Wilcox of the SWS getting a bullet in the backside. Thereafter shoots were generally accompanied by a Scouts gasht, and the Jandola Mess Game Book contains in the 'Various' column an enigmatic entry: '2 Wazirs'. South Waziristan had quite good mahseer fishing in the Tank Zam, and there was no case of an angler being shot up. Pathans have great sympathy for the mentally afflicted.

The Agency Surgeons at Miranshah and Jandola were busy men, treating not only Scouts but the locals. Gunshot and knife wounds were the commonest complaint. These doctors were pioneers of plastic surgery. Many an injured husband cut off the nose of his erring wife, and then, regretting his hasty action, took her to the hospital to have it sewn on again. The graft was made by cutting a flap from the forehead and letting it fall down over the missing feature. There were problems in treating the tribal ladies, since any husband would far rather his wife died than that her body should be seen, let alone touched, by another man. In cases where modesty was at risk, the patient's husband would describe the symptoms while the doctor, on the other side of a screen, asked questions and prescribed treatment.

All Pathans, including Scouts, dreaded operations under anaesthetics, not least because they feared that an infidel surgeon might, while they were unconscious, incapacitate them from getting the full enjoyment from the Houris of Paradise. It could take hours, when every minute counted, to persuade a Scout to have his appendix removed, or a bullet-smashed limb amputated. One morning Nat Cosby was told by the Medical Officer, 'I have an appendix case on the table, but he won't let me operate. Can you come over?' Cosby wrote:

> I went across, and found a young Afridi boy very scared, who said (using the English word) he did not want operation. I told him that if he had had so much pain, the Doctor Sahib would put him to sleep and he would wake up with the pain gone. He persisted, 'I don't want operation.' I sent for the Subadar Major who reasoned with the boy without success. Then I tried the hard line and said, 'Well, if you won't have an operation, you'll be no good for the Scouts, and you'll be thrown out.' He looked at me like a beaten dog and said again, 'Oh Sahib, I don't want operation.' Things did not look hopeful. Then I said, 'Suppose I take *Zamanat* (Security) for your life, will you agree?' He thought for a moment and replied, 'Sahib, if you will take *Zamanat* for me and stay with me while the Doctor Sahib works, I will agree.' I said, 'That's fine, we'll go ahead.'

The operation was successful, and the boy soon fit and well.

Geoffrey Hawkins of the Zhob Militia was asked by the Medical Officer, Jimmy James, 'I wonder if you'd give me a hand? I have to operate on a man's spine and need some help.' Hawkins

> got into some white hospital kit, and when the patient had been put out, and certain preliminaries carried out by Jimmy, I was given a long spoon-thing and told to push it up and down the patient's spine. But with the terrible scraping noise, and lots of blood, I went out like a light.

Hawkins had to be revived by a large brandy: Nature had not fashioned him for a surgeon. The patient recovered.

A Medical Officer at Miranshah was standing outside the civil hospital near a group of tribesmen, squatting on the ground with their rifles between their knees. Suddenly one upped with his rifle and took a pot-shot at the doctor, miraculously missing. He then made a bolt for it. He probably knew enough about Scouts' habits to assume that the recruits drilling on the parade ground would not have ammunition in

their bandoliers. What he did not realise was that there was also a cadre-class of Havildars, seasoned men of eight to ten years' service, who did have live ammunition. He had not a chance. Two dropped to the sitting position, took careful aim at the running figure and fired a single shot each, dropping him before he had run two hundred yards. Then began a search for the doctor. It was some time before he was found – taking refuge in the women's purdah ward.

The Wing Headquarters forts were completed, Sarwekai and Sarawogha in the south, Khajuri in the north in the early 1920s. They were smaller versions of Jandola and Miranshah, with vegetable and fruit gardens, but fewer amenities. The smaller posts were at first mere camps, surrounded by barbed wire and bullet-proof drystone walls, the tents dug down to give more headroom, warmth and protection from sniping. Each Wing garrisoned two or three of these outposts, initially as follows:

South Waziristan Scouts

Jandola	Corps Headquarters and 1 troop Mounted Infantry
	Wing Headquarters and 13 infantry platoons
	3 infantry platoons at Chagmalai
Sarwekai	Wing Headquarters and 11 infantry platoons
	1 troop Mounted Infantry
	3 infantry platoons at Splitoi
Sararogha	Wing Headquarters and 9 infantry platoons
	5 infantry platoons at Kotkai
	2 infantry platoons at Ahnai Tangi

Later, in the 1930s, Chagmalai and Splitoi were handed over to Khassadars, and new Scouts posts were built at Tanai, Tiarza and Ladha. The SWS road-post system resembled a wishbone with the two arms joined at Jandola. On the right arm the posts were Kotkai, Ahnai Tangi, Sararogha and Ladha; on the left arm, Sarwekai, Tanai and Tiarza.

Tochi Scouts

Miranshah	Corps headquarters and 1 troop Mounted Infantry
	Wing Headquarters and 10 infantry platoons
	4 infantry platoons at Datta Khel
	2 infantry platoons at Boya
	2 infantry platoons and 1 troop Mounted Infantry at Mir Ali

Khajuri Wing Headquarters and 9 infantry platoons
7 infantry platoons at Spinwam
3 infantry platoons at Shewa
2 infantry platoons at Razmak

Later the Tochi Scouts left Razmak and built a new post at Dosalli which replaced Khajuri as a Wing Headquarters. Khajuri, Mir Ali, Miranshah, Boya and Datta Khel were on or near the road running westward from Bannu; Spinwam and Shewa were on the road running north-west from Mir Ali to Thal; Dosalli and Razmak were on the Central Waziristan road which linked the North and South Waziristan road system (see Map 10, p. 240).

Life in the camps was never comfortable. The dug-in tents, lit by pressure-lamps, were hot in summer, very cold in winter, alive with mosquitoes, sandflies and fleas. As each fort was completed, the corresponding camp was demolished and the garrison moved into the fort. It might not be a home from home, but it was far more comfortable, safe and healthy than the camp. After 1927, posts were armed with Vickers machine-guns, for post-defence only, not to be taken on gasht because they would cramp mobility.

Every fort had a mosque, built by the men and (to the annoyance of the Garrison Engineer) always askew to the rest of the layout since it had to be meticulously aligned, with atlas and prismatic compass, on Mecca.

John Prendergast spent two months with no other British officer in Datta Khel fort. He writes:

> It was difficult to fill in time, and boredom hung heavily on my soul. We continued to carry out a weekly gasht on foot over the steep, shaly hills, but we encountered no hostile tribesmen. We played football on the level, stony waste outside the fort: it was terribly hard falling and I bear scars to this day. From the fort I spent hours watching the changing light and colours on the hills in the distance. There was not a single growing thing in the tremendous sweep of the wide valley and it looked as smooth as if swept by a giant broom. But this was deceptive as, being a soil-eroded country, it was scored by deep ravines or nullahs, any one of which could have concealed scores of tribesmen . . . Then my gaze would drop to the inside of the fort. Its walls were of the usual clay and chopped straw, that extraordinarily durable mixture that archaeologists have found to last over a thousand years in this dry climate . . .
>
> In the centre there was a pitch on which we played a peculiarly

> rough kind of basketball. There was none of your squeal and pass. You grappled with the man who had the ball to make him surrender it. The men's quarters were built round this, backing on to the walls. They had pulled their string beds out into the sun for airing; some were pouring boiling water on to the frames to destroy the bed-bugs. They were polishing away – one was twanging musically on the strings of a rabab – others were singing in high-pitched, nasal voices of bygone forays and abductions. There was a smooth walk-way above the quarters round the crenellated walls and at each corner there was a tower, loop-holed for medium machine-guns . . . The nights were long and I used to hear the sentries on the wall shouting their numbers in order: number one sentry, number two, and so on. If a sentry was asleep and he didn't shout his number, the fact was immediately detectable . . .
>
> Sometimes the Pathan officers used to invite me down to wonderful feasts of mutton pilau and thick, flat, wholemeal bread served piping hot. I would return the compliment, of course, using their cooks but paying the bill. The senior Subadar, Kabul Khan, was a tough, pock-marked Afridi from high up in the Tirah. His land was lavishly covered with conifers and his family had the wood-contract for far-off Peshawar. Great beams were carried down on hefty Bactrian camels. This part of Afridi territory had never been penetrated by the British. I remarked that his country must be very beautiful and I would like to come and see it. He replied, 'If you did, I would shoot you.' I gathered that it was a matter of principle and not personal . . . We finished off the feast with green tea which was brought in brick form from China by camel. This, spiced with white cardamon, makes a wonderful carminative after a full feast.

Kabul Khan and his five brothers in the Tirah owned a proper, modern 3·7 ins howitzer, with ammunition, acquired by devious means from the Afghan army. Despite his toughness and undoubted efficiency, he had a touch of a small boy, evinced one bitter January day at Datta Khel when he snowballed the senior Madda Khel Malik, a huge, sour-tempered fellow who failed to see the joke. This Malik was reputed to have buried under his house 20,000 golden guineas and 20,000 Russian gold coins. When he brought his daughters in to be treated by the Sub-Assistant Surgeon, the little girls' headscarves were sewn all over with gold pieces.

Harry Garland was commanding Datta Khel post in 1930 when his

Commandant, Frank Mardall, arrived with an unexpected visitor, well known by his pen-name, 'Ian Hay', as the writer of Great War novels. For someone so familiar with the military scene, 'Ian Hay' showed an almost childish desire to fire the Vickers gun. Garland did not think it a good idea; he had not time to clear the area, and did not want accidents to the local tribesmen or their livestock. However Mardall said, 'Let him have a go, Harry.' So 'Ian Hay' sat down behind the gun, selected as his target a harmless rock and pulverised it with a whole belt of 250 rounds. A gasht had to be sent to ensure that no one was hurt and no bogus claims for compensation would be lodged. That night they slept on the roof, owing to the heat, and were awakened by shots cracking over them; someone was expressing disapprobation of the Empire by sniping from the vegetable garden. 'What should we do?' asked 'Ian Hay'. 'Stay in bed,' Garland replied, 'go back to sleep.' Eventually the sniping stopped. Next morning the Man of Letters returned to Bannu delighted with his exploits in the furthest outpost of Empire and full of praise for the young officer's sang-froid. But it was not sang-froid: by an exercise in simple trigonometry Garland had ascertained that any shots fired from the vegetable garden must either smack into the parapet or pass at least four feet overhead. One was perfectly safe in bed, but in some danger out of it.

Talk at the Pathan officers' tikalas ranged far and wide, for they had many interests and were well informed on world affairs. At a tikka given by Terence Philips at Datta Khel

> We covered the decline of the English birth-rate, the price of rifles, the number of beards in England, and matrimony. I said it must be very hard on the married men seeing their wives only on leave, and Zeri Gul, the Jani Khel Wazir, said, 'Ah yes, but, my goodness, we make the most of it! You can always tell a married man when he comes back from leave because he can scarcely put one foot in front of another.'

The conversation then turned to the exorbitant cost of brides.

> Aman Gul said, 'If I wanted to marry, I should have to pay three thousand rupees for a bride, and it is hard for a young man to find so much money, so most of us have to wait until we are near middle-aged.' Everyone condemned this selling of brides, and Zeri Gul said, 'Up in Swat a girl comes with a dowry.' When I asked why he did not go to Swat for a bride, Lal Mohamad replied, 'No, it would be no

good. A girl who has brought in so much money would think herself far too grand to work as our wives must.'

Datta Khel had a remarkable fruit and vegetable garden, producing quantities of vegetables, peaches, apricots and grapes literally by the hundredweight for the garrison. It had an all-ranks swimming pool. The Tochi valley was one of the main bird migration routes, and the garden was full of them in spring and autumn. Philips noted harriers; and chaffinches,

> here at the extreme eastern limit of their range for though I saw several in the Datta Khel garden, they had been reported only once before in India. Rosy Pastors, too, a sort of pink starling, besides four other races of starling, the Himalayan, Central Asian, Finsch's and Hume's, all with a different distribution on their feathers of brilliant glossy green, purple, copper-purple, purple-red, violet-purple, bronze copper and blue; and the hills round about in the hot weather were full of the sweet-singing Bay Backed Shrike.

As part of their general awareness of the world, many Scouts had a good knowledge of birds, naming not only the common varieties but, for instance, the Bluethroat, and the White-capped Redstart, distinguishing between the Scarlet and the Little Minivet, the pied and yellow wagtail and knowing the names of even such exotica as Stolieza's Mountain Finch. To Philips this was a revelation.

However content he and others were with life in the posts, not every British officer could put up with it, which was why the vetting of would-be Scouts officers was so carefully done. Even so, there were unhappy times. Two officers, together for weeks, never communicated except by written notes; two more actually came to blows over the emotive question of whether an aircraft signalling panel be laid out on this piece of flat ground or on another or on another piece ten yards away. Outpost life would have been unbearable but for the remarkable affinity between British officers and Pathans.

In the South Waziristan Scouts the last of the posts to be completed, in 1936, was Ladha, 7,000 feet above sea-level, surrounded by well-wooded hills, in summer cool and healthy, in winter often under snow. It cannot be said that the Scouts were welcomed by the local Mahsuds. Said one old man, 'We'd rather have four brigades of infantry than a thousand Scouts. The Army will sit quietly within its wire and we can sell it eggs and chickens, and if they march out we will know exactly

where they are going and how far they can go. But the Scouts come fr anywhere, and go anywhere, and we never know from which side th are coming next.'

It was in the small posts that the British officers got to know the h tribesmen, provided they wished to be known. At Ladha Fo Venning and 'Bush' McDonald had as their nearest neighbour a plu moustached, pippin-faced Mahsud named Shah Pasand, which ma translated as 'Prince Charming'. His fellow-tribesmen, however, g erally called him *Kurnail*, 'Colonel', because he had been comman of the Amir's Bodyguard in Kabul until 1930 when, seeing the wri on the wall, he had anticipated his royal master's deposition decamping with as many rifles and boxes of ammunition as could loaded on to a hastily-improvised mule convoy. With this as nest-egg, he had settled down near Ladha as a gentleman of leisu building an imposing mansion complete with a fortified tower. He never actually detected in crime or hostile action, and was on friendliest terms with the Ladha officers; but no one trusted him a ya In 1942 he was joined by his brother who as a young man had emigra to Burma where, by industry and honest ways, especially in management of a chain of lucrative brothels, he had become exce ingly rich. He had got out one jump ahead of the Japanese – no mea feat for one of generous proportions and sedentary habits. From Ladh like a retired Indian Army Colonel in Bournemouth, he looked ba with nostalgic longing to the good old days. 'People here,' he com plained, 'do not know how to live, they are savages. When will th British re-conquer Burma?' The two brothers, both highly conce scent, found as they aged that desire outran performance, and took the problem to the Scouts Medical Officer, who kept them supplied with stock of 'Buck-you-up-o pills', air-dropped with the Ladha mail on th not infrequent occasions when their fellow-tribesmen blocked the road

Each fort and post kept a chiga platoon ready to sally out at moment's notice, usually by an inconspicuous, defiladed 'chiga doo (also known as 'the thieves' door') to deal with any untoward situation Benjie Bromhead was in charge at Sararogha when:

> The little fort at Ahnai Tangi reported firing across the road. Now the tribes were free to shoot each other so long as the shooting did not happen within the vicinity of government posts or property, but the road was inviolable. So the chiga platoon was summoned by the banging of the Quarter Guard gong, a short piece of suspended rail. At this tocsin, they fell in and raced across the plain towards Ahnai

hilst a support company stood to. I went ahead in my car with the nior Pathan officer and we were met at the foot of the slope below hnai by a group of men from the garrison. Firing had ceased, and found a wounded Mahsud lying on the road beyond the fort, shot the stomach, his entrails protruding. He was a tough bearded man ith eyes of stone, and he made no murmur as we laid him carefully the back of my car. We drove back slowly, the chiga party llowing, and the Medical Attendant soon dealt with his wound nding the Agency Surgeon's arrival. He survived, and I visited im in hospital, to be met with the same hard stare and little to say in nswer to my questions. He was a silent man, with hatred in his eyes, nd I felt almost sorry for those who had tried to kill him.

In July 1935, Victor Wainright of the Tochi Scouts took over the outs post near Razmak.

This was a tented camp for four or five platoons on the bank of the algad running from the Sui Dar to Razmak camp proper. It was there to try and prevent the constant bickering between the Abdullai Mahsuds and the Tori Khel Wazirs about the grazing around the algad.

Mir Hamza, Jowaki Afridi,* was the senior Subadar. He was a iry little man, knee-high to a duck, very smart, very fit and very bloodthirsty – a sort of human combination of Kerry Blue, Bull Terrier and Staffordshire. Although intelligent and full of nous, his immediate reaction to any trouble was to rush at it bull-necked. He was quite alarmingly outspoken and the greatest fun. His closest friend was the senior Aka Khel Afridi Subadar, Kabul Khan, of much the same age and seniority, both young for their standing. Kabul was as brave and as capable but either more intelligent or given to thinking a little longer. Miry and Kabul were like affectionate brothers and together behaved like mischievous prep-school boys, always playing practical jokes with the object of making the victim late for parade or look stupid in some way. They would then have terrific mock quarrels and go round telling anyone who would listen what a shit the other was.

Anyway, my first Sunday, I was just lighting my after-breakfast pipe when there were shots around the camp, the chiga-gong went and Miry in gashting order appeared in the door of the British

* Son of Hony Captain Tor Khan, one-time Subadar Major of the North Waziristan Militia. See page 25.

officer's hut looking remarkably like a hunt-terrier with the [illegible] half-off. I asked him what cooked, and he replied more or less [illegible] breath, 'It's Mahsuds and Wazirs, and by the time you've got [illegible] uniform shirt, pagri and pistol the chiga platoon plus the Kuki [illegible] platoon will be ready to move.' A few seconds later I said, 'What [illegible] I do?' The answer was polite, 'I suggest you order me to chase [illegible] Wazirs like hell up the left bank with the chiga while you do the [illegible] to the Mahsuds up the right bank with the Kuki Khel. With any [illegible] the buggers will fight, but they are much more likely to surrender [illegible] say it was all a mistake or hop it through the scrub.' By this time [illegible] rest of the post were standing to along the perimeter wall, [illegible] streaked off, uphill, against the wind, on a very hot morning in [illegible] thorny scrub at 7,000 feet plus.

The Kuki Khel – very tough, with egg-shaped heads because [illegible] mothers bind them when they are tiny -- grabbed three or four [illegible] active Mahsuds, full of injured innocence about being quietly grazed [illegible] their goats when they were shot at by dastardly Wazirs. After we had [illegible] gone a mile or two the shooting stopped, so we halted in a defensive [illegible] position and Miry came across to say he had done the same. I decided [illegible] to call it a morning and hand the prisoners in to the Tahsildar [illegible] Razmak. At this juncture my Aka Khel orderly, who was very like me [illegible] in build and colouring and tied my pagri exactly like his, handed me a [illegible] rather odd-looking bullet and said, 'Who's a lucky boy to be hit by a [illegible] spent one? It bounced off your leg and you'd better send it home to [illegible] your Mum.' Sure enough, the mark was there on the front of my [illegible] thigh, rather like a deep burn.

A few days later some Abdullai Maliks came in to say that they [illegible] were rather grateful to their gallant friends the Militia, because [illegible] actually they had been caught on the hop and badly outnumbered. [illegible] Would I like to go unarmed with my orderly next Sunday to shoot a [illegible] bear on Sui Dar? They would feed us and lend me a good rifle. I [illegible] accepted with alacrity. By this time Mir Hamza had gone on leave [illegible] and the senior Subadar was Sar Gul, Kuki Khel, commonly known [illegible] as Mian Sahib* because he was one. I told the old boy (about 40) of [illegible] the Mahsud invitation and he said, 'You'll do nothing so foolish.'

'Subadar Sahib, may I remind you that I am commanding?'

'Sahib, that is no problem. My Kuki Khel platoon will restrain [illegible] you. I'm going on pension in less than a year, and I'd prefer to risk [illegible] disciplinary trouble than be derided for the rest of my life as the [illegible]

* A Mian is a kind of holy man.

Subadar who let his young officer be had for a mug by Mahsuds.'

When I pointed out that one of the Maliks was a pensioned Subadar from my cousin's battalion of the Baluch regiment, he replied with several interesting Pushtu proverbs, variations on the theme *merde alors*.

So Wainright never did get his bear-shoot, and the Mahsuds never did get Wainright.

They nearly got Neville Williams (Stanley P's son), however, a few years later, when he was with the SWS in Ladha. On the mountain above Ladha lived Wali Zar, universally acknowledged to be an out and out rogue. He invited to dinner Williams and James Watson, a tough, hard drinking little Scot, older than most subalterns, who came to the Indian Army and Scouts from the Digboi oil-fields. Everyone warned Williams against accepting the invitation, the Pathan Tahsildar telling him, 'Wali Zar first class rascal *dé*'. But Williams, with a family tradition to uphold, regarded it as a challenge. He did, however, as a precaution tell the Post Subadar to send out the chiga platoon if he was not safely back by six o'clock. He was regaled with a terrific spread, every kind of Pathan delicacy till he was fairly bursting, the rice oozing out of his toes. In the East it is for the host, not for the guest, to intimate that it is time to go; and Wali Zar was in no hurry to give 'the permission'. Williams became more and more apprehensive, but could not depart without grossly insulting his host; Watson afterwards recalled 'Och, you know we were sitting there and there was nothing more to be said, and I could feel the hair rising on the back of my neck, and I knew that something was *wroong*'. Suddenly there was an uproar from outside, two or three rifle-shots rang out and in burst the Ladha chiga platoon. The Post Subadar, thoroughly disapproving of the whole enterprise, had sent it off half an hour before Williams had ordered. Thirty armed Mahsuds were flushed from the vicinity, some hiding actually under the floor-boards of the house.

A different kind of emergency occurred at Khajuri in the Tochi when Nat Cosby was commanding it in the 1920s. This is his account:

A caravan of Powindahs returning to Afghanistan from India camped about five hundred yards from our post. Through my glasses I saw intensive digging going on. A local said they were burying many people. I sent my Sub-Assistant Surgeon across to find out what was the matter. He returned saying, 'Sir, many men are dying of vomiting and diarrhoea.' Suspecting cholera, I rang up the Medical

Officer at Miranshah who came down and confirmed my suspic
The caravan was upstream of us, and we in the fort and piquet
drew water from the Tochi river. Immediate action was to di
water only from midstream, since the cholera germ likes slugg
water near the edge and does not survive in fast running wa
Immediately our first case occurred. I had isolation tents pitch
between the walls and the barbed wire apron. We were lucky to
away with four cases, of whom three were saved by a saline int
venous drip. The men readily queued up for cholera inoculations
this epidemic really scared them.

9

Gashts, Baramptas and such

The main purpose of an outpost was to serve as a base for gashts. The term 'gasht' is more descriptive than 'patrol' because it conveys the impression of speed. In Scouts' English it was used as a verb, 'to gasht'; or as a noun, 'a gasht of twenty-five miles' or 'a gasht of four platoons'. The gasht was the commonest Scout operation, a patrol of about four-platoon strength. It had six objects:

(a) Training
(b) Peace-keeping between the tribes
(c) Discouraging raids and the assembly of hostile lashkars. It was better to deter than to punish.
(d) Acquiring detailed topographical knowledge
(e) Giving moral support to friendly tribes
(f) Demonstrating that Sarkar's forces could move where and when they wished, right up to the Durand Line.

It was Major S. P. Williams who developed the long gasht in the South Waziristan Scouts, made possible by the construction of forts to replace camps. High-walled, loop-holed and wired, a fort needed fewer guards than a camp, which meant more men could be spared for gashts which could venture further afield and stay out for longer. Soon twelve miles was a mere morning stroll and gashts of twenty-five to thirty miles a day were commonplace. In order to appreciate the gasht, it must be compared to a move by regular troops in Waziristan, usually a brigade group known as a 'column'.

Whatever form a daylight operation took – advance to make contact, formal attack, destruction of a hostile village, rearguard, convoy pro-

tection – the basis of it was piqueting, known to our grandfathers by its more picturesque term of 'crowning the heights'. Any column was accompanied by an immensely long train of camels, horses and mules carrying artillery and machine-guns, rations and ammunition, blankets, greatcoats and tents, barbed wire, picks and shovels, picketing ropes and stakes and telephone-wire, water-pumps and canvas troughs, clerks and field post-offices and cooks – all the clutter and impedimenta and non-combatants which seemed just as necessary to an Indian Army column in the 1920s as television and press correspondents, photographers and television cameras and sound-recorders, typewriters and teleprinters and Public Relations Officers are to a British Task Force sixty years later. They made a target which no sniper could miss, even at a thousand or twelve hundred yards. Therefore no column moved without first placing small bodies of troops – a couple of sections, a platoon, or a cavalry troop in more open country – on any hill within range of the axis of advance. This made movement very slow and laborious, but the Government was concerned that the job should be done with the least possible casualties, and 'sweat saves blood'.

The method of posting and withdrawing a piquet was laid down in exact detail: it had to be, since the piquet, perhaps fifteen hundred yards from its parent unit, had no communication save flag and heliograph and perhaps only a junior NCO in command.

Piquets were found by a unit reserved for that purpose, and placed by the advanced guard commander. As the column moved along the road, which was nearly always along a valley, they fanned out to the commanding heights as indicated to each piquet commander with a pointer staff. The piquet moved up a ridge and over open country so that ambushes were avoided and it was clearly visible to the supporting artillery and machine-guns. It operated according to the normal principles of fire-and-movement, generally with a Lewis gun covering the advance of the rifle-sections. The piquet-commander prominently displayed a small canvas screen, khaki on the side facing towards the enemy, orange on the side facing down into the valley, so that his position could be clearly seen by his friends. Having reached his objective, he disposed his men for all-round defence, dug or built up such cover as was practicable, 'rocked' any dead ground immediately beneath him, and stayed there, keeping a very good look-out, until recalled.

He had meanwhile left two 'road sentries' on the line of march with a chit giving the piquet's serial number, strength and position. These were handed to the rear-guard commander. He recalled the piquet by a

'pull out' signal with a huge red flag, and the piquet's serial number indicated by some method intelligible to the thickest Lance Naik even if the piquet signaller had been killed. This signal meant, 'Pull out as soon as you like but as quickly as you can.'

Now came the most dangerous part of the operation, productive of the most casualties. From the enemy's point of view it was far more rewarding, as it was likely to result in the capture of rifles, to attack a withdrawing piquet in the afternoon, than an advancing piquet in the morning. Furthermore, as the tribesmen mutilated any prisoner who fell into their hands, it was unthinkable to leave wounded men behind. If possible even the dead, and certainly their rifles, must be brought in.

Lest it run into an ambush, the withdrawal should be by an unlikely route, which the road-sentries must know and point out to the rear-guard commander. It should not follow the route by which the piquet came up. First, men named by the piquet commander crawled back over the crest and ran down in pairs to a lay-back position; then the Lewis-gun section went down to that position; finally the piquet commander and the remainder of his men came bounding down from the hill, twice as fast as they ever thought they could move over such ground and waving the piquet-screen. They had to run like heli, first because the enemy, who might well have been lurking all day within a hundred yards of them, would be on the peak shooting the instant they left it; and secondly because the artillery and medium machine-guns would open up on the peak the instant the piquet was clear. If things went badly and the last man off the peak was wounded, the whole withdrawal had to be halted, and a section – a platoon – a whole company might have to be sent up again to rescue him.

Scouts were trained in piqueting; they were often employed, when under command of a brigade column, in piqueting the more distant and highest peaks. But on their own gashts, although they moved in tactical formation, they seldom sent out piquets because they had no support to protect. While a regular Army column crawled through Waziristan at, with luck, ten miles a day, gashts raced along four and a half or five miles an hour, faster in the case of the Mounted Infantry, generally keeping to high ground and ridges because it wanted to be seen. A gasht which saw no tribesmen for a whole day would still have done its job if tribesmen saw the gasht, or even if they saw only its footprints.

A gasht could be self-contained for two or three days, sleeping rough, living on tea, onions, parched grain and *caak*, the travelling

Pathan's unleavened bread made from dough wrapped round a [illegible] stone and baked in embers.

A Scout, officer or man, went on about two gashts a week, gener[illegible] one-day affairs, sometimes longer. In more or less peaceful condit[illegible] most gashts did more than twenty miles a day, a fact not unconnect[illegible] with the modest travel allowance which officers drew for twenty [illegible] more miles. An unusually long gasht was made by Denis Ambr[illegible] forty-eight miles in twenty-three hours, with a temperature of [illegible] Fahrenheit in the non-existent shade and several 1,000 foot clim[illegible] between Sarwekai and the Gumal.

It is lamentable to record that the Political Agent's private am[illegible] wearing strange raiment, speaking a strange language and claiming [illegible] expertise denied to others did not win unqualified approval in milit[illegible] circles. Such are the imperfections of human nature that there w[illegible] even suggestions that the Scouts should be down-graded to police [illegible] disbanded, their duties taken over by regulars who would be mo[illegible] reliable, since they included few if any Pathans, and better value [illegible] money, since they could be employed overseas, or on internal secur[illegible] duties in Bombay and Calcutta. With these considerations in mi[illegible] Northern Command decreed that one hundred regular soldiers [illegible] given a month's intensive training and then take part in a normal Sco[illegible] gasht, twenty-four miles of rough going, in order to prove that 'an[illegible] thing they can do, we can do better'. (The scheme was hatched by [illegible] senior officer who had, years earlier, been unintentionally humiliat[illegible] by S. P. Williams who had taken him up and down a steep mountain [illegible] breeches and tight field-boots.) In one test a company of Gurkh[illegible] finished the course not very long after the Scouts. But over the othe[illegible] test a discreet veil was drawn by Northern Command: the officer w[illegible] brought in on a stretcher and so many men collapsed that a squad [illegible] Scout recruits had to be sent out to bring in stragglers and rifles.

Thereafter less was said about phasing out the Scouts, but they wer[illegible] still regarded in some quarters with envy, hatred and all uncharitable[illegible] ness, and on occasions when their performance fell short of perfection[illegible] loud was the jubilation. It was not uncommon for troops new to the [illegible] Frontier to mistake the Scouts in their Pathan-style uniform fo[illegible] tribesmen, and shoot them up. Hence the apocryphal Scouts' maxim: [illegible] 'Always take cover on the side of the hill facing the enemy: they only [illegible] have rifles.'

If a man, perhaps unwell, could not keep up, his friends would help [illegible] him and carry his rifle. If he still could not keep up, he was left with food [illegible] and water, but without rifle and ammunition, to make his way to the [illegible]

[illegible] post. If he did this once, it was a disgrace; twice, a worse [illegible]; a third time, he was sacked.

With exactly the same weapons as their enemy – ·303 rifles and speed [illegible] country – Scouts were unique in twentieth-century counter-[illegible]rgency forces. But a gasht on its own, with no machine-guns, [illegible]tars or artillery, could hardly tackle a really strong lashkar. It was [illegible] meant to, there was no disgrace in retreat or going round another [illegible]. Its safety lay in secrecy and surprise, in never doing the same thing [illegible] same way three times in succession. The route for the next day's [illegible] was never divulged until the fort gates were closed for the night, [illegible] gashts avoided any routine of routes or halts. This was particularly [illegible]portant when they were accompanied by Khassadars.

[illegible]outs signallers were trained to send messages in morse by flag, [illegible] and helio. But all three methods require visual contact between [illegible]der and receiver, a flag cannot be read over long distances, and a [illegible] is of little use in broad daylight. Helio is an efficient method of [illegible]nalling up to fifty miles if the sun is shining, but to establish a helio [illegible] takes time and skill on the part of the operator who, standing [illegible]essarily in the sunlight, may be exposed to sniping. And the helio [illegible]pod, once contact is established, must not be moved by so much as a [illegible]rter inch until the message has been sent and acknowledged. None [illegible] these methods was of much use when help was needed quickly, so [illegible]ery gasht had four carrier-pigeons, borne in crates on the signallers' [illegible]cks, which would carry a message to base. The message was written [illegible] thin paper, rolled into a cylinder fixed to the pigeon's leg, and the [illegible]ds were sent off in pairs, with identical messages, to run the gauntlet [illegible] falcons.

[illegible]ometimes the pigeons would not play – or, rather, would not work. [illegible]hn Prendergast in the Tochi had a problem for which Sandhurst had [illegible] prepared him when a pair of pigeons, released to summon help when [illegible] gasht was ambushed, instead of circling round to get their bearing [illegible]d then winging away to Datta Khel, perched in a tree billing and [illegible]ing at one another. They had to be stoned until they stopped [illegible]hilandering and got on with the job. It was equally frustrating when [illegible]ey would not come to hand at their destination but sat cooing on a [illegible]l, ignoring all blandishments. One unfortunate bird, believed to be [illegible]ithholding a message of vital importance, was shot. With urgent [illegible]nds the cylinder was detached from the fluttering corpse, the pre-[illegible]us message pulled out, unrolled and perused. It read, 'If you're as [illegible]oody thirsty as I am, God help you.'

For a newly joined officer a 'star' gasht, over twenty miles, could be

an ordeal, especially in hot weather. The flies buzzing round a sweaty damp face were irritating in the sun, unendurable in the shade. Camel-flies – like horse-flies only more so – stabbed the soft skin of wrists and behind the knees. One was thirsty the whole time, but must not drink because it only made one sweat the more, and become more exhausted. The chapli took some getting used to. With its high heel-strap, it is a wonderfully practical sandal for climbing up a dry stony hill, but its open toe lets in grit and sand which the wearer learns to shake out without breaking step or slowing down. The occasional devil-thorn or spear-grass seed – and no one can walk a yard with it under the sole – cannot be shaken out; one must stop to remove it, then hurry to catch up. A winter gasht could be awful with the bitter wind from Siberia cutting through shirt, pullover, and partog, mud slippery in the chaplis, snow perhaps on the ground and blowing in one's face.

But British officers, once they were fit, enjoyed gashting. It was what they had joined the Scouts for, far better than PT, drill and weapon-training behind the barbed wire of an army camp. If there was a British officer on a gasht, he was in command, and took the blame if anything went wrong. However, he would be very foolish not to consult his infinitely experienced gasht Subadar. The Pathan officers carried rolled round their walking-sticks small flags for signalling, yellow for the platoon commanders, red-and-yellow for the gasht Subadar. To watch the latter handling a five-platoon gasht moving fast and widely extended over rough country, silently with vigorous flag- and hand-signals, was an education. It required a high degree of tactical sense and knowledge of the local situation. FitzMaurice compared a gasht and its Subadar to a pack of hounds and its huntsman. A truer comparison – since a good huntsman leaves hounds to work out their own line – would be to a team of sheep-dogs watching for and obeying every signal of the shepherd. They were not super-men: platoon commanders did not always do the right thing but they were all men of experience and common sense, and if some unexpected situation developed, they coped with it.

In a country where almost every man went armed, it was one of the rules of the game that the tribesman carrying a rifle and festooned with cartridge-belts was a peaceful shepherd until he fired at you. But what about ten tribesmen who dived for cover as the gasht came within sight? A gasht commander had to make quick decisions guided only by experience and common sense; if he was wrong, a

couple of his men might die, or an innocent man be killed, starting a new tribal war.

Bongie Bromhead, large, fair and moustached, joined the South Waziristan Scouts in 1929 when S. P. Williams was still Commandant. He was posted to the 2nd Wing at Sararogha, commanded by Golly Gilbert, who, with a shock of white hair despite his youth and a large ginger moustache, was a most tolerant and efficient tutor. The 1st Wing was commanded by Bill Felix-Williams, who had the unusual distinction of playing rugger and soccer for Cardiff in the same season. He was still very active, though sometimes incommoded by pieces of shrapnel acquired on the Western Front while serving under-age in a Public Schools Battalion. Although his Pushtu was poor, he was an inspiring leader in action, less inspiring in administration.

The 3rd Wing was commanded by Jock Scotland, a burly extrovert with a tremendous zest for life and a fierce pride in his Wing. He was a noted trencherman. At feasts given by friendly Maliks, while other officers quailed at the huge piles of mutton and savoury rice, he would loosen his belt and fall to with a will, concluding with a series of reverberating belches which gave the utmost satisfaction to his smiling hosts: 'By God!' they would exclaim, 'There's a man!' His favourite hot-weather relaxation was to sit in the swimming pool at Sarwekai, listening to classical music and consuming peaches and apricots which grew there in profusion. He had a large, undisciplined and thoroughly spoilt Labrador who paid not the smallest attention to his master's stentorian summonses, 'Bongie! Come here and be beaten!' But Bongie once turned up trumps. Scotland and Henry Cubitt-Smith were taking advantage of a quiet gasht to shoot rock-pigeons. Suddenly Bongie dived into a cave and flushed therefrom an eminent Mahsud, wearing no trousers, who hared away across country in the belief that the shots he heard had been fired by the husband of the lady he was entertaining.

Every British and Pathan officer had an orderly. An orderly was not a domestic servant; he did not cook for his officer, or make up his officer's bed. He kept his officer's belt and weapons clean and was his bodyguard at all times. On gasht he had to be present even if his officer withdrew behind a rock for the purposes of nature. He accompanied his officer on leave, and on shooting and fishing trips. He had certain privileges, such as exemption from guard duties and fatigues. He might (depending on personalities) have his officer's ear and be able to 'put in a word' for someone. It was a position which was sometimes abused. But in action if an officer was hit, his orderly was expected to stay and, if necessary,

die with him. Relations between officer and orderly could be very close. (But not as close as was implied by the raised eyebrows on the platform of Rawalpindi Station at the spectacle of Victor Wainright and his Aka Khel orderly embracing on the occasion of Wainright's departure on home leave.)

Bromhead was allocated Aliman, a Bhitanni, an unsophisticated stocky youth, natural and uninhibited. Once when the brakes of Bromhead's car failed and he took a corner too fast, Aliman hacked him sharply on the ankle with a cry of 'God seize you!' followed by an apologetic smile.

Some weeks after Bromhead joined, he took a gasht through the Girni mountains south of Jandola.

We crossed over the watershed from Jandola into the Girni Algad, a short distance from its exit on to the plain, 100 rifles with a tall Akora Khattak Subadar as senior Pathan officer. He was a spare man with a tireless stride, silent but friendly. We turned up the main ravine towards the mountain, whose skirts were eroded in deep ravines. Sending a small party up on to the high ground, we moved up a deep cleft whose sides became sheer cliffs and the sky a narrow strip above. The cleft became narrower and eventually we climbed out by a side funnel to emerge with some relief on to the lap of the mountain. Its summit was a broken cliff above us and the ground rose steeply towards it. We linked with the rest of the gasht and, dispersed as far as the ground would allow, climbed to the col, a long high climb.

Before descending the west face we climbed the shoulder above the col, near which there was an extraordinary rock fashioned by time and weather into an arch. Beyond it the Derajat Plain stretched away to the Indus, invisible in the haze. Up on the hill, at about 5,000 feet, it was comparatively cool, but below us the mouth of the Gumal shimmered in the heat. We dropped again to the col, and then down steeply into the Mastang, a forbidding ravine below the west face of the Girni Sar. Here the Jalal Khel had cave-dwellings which now in the summer were empty. The lower end of the Mastang sloped down to the Shahur stream at its exit from the Shahur Tangi. On the far bank was an acre of level ground, the only cultivable soil in this part of the Jalal Khel territory. No wonder they were raiders.

As we entered the Jandola gate my Akora companion was still tireless, and the Scouts marched as if they had been but a short way. But it had been a long trek, twenty-five miles on the map across wild country, with a climb and descent of over 3,000 feet.

On another hot-weather gasht from Sararogha, they rested in the shade of ilex trees on the summit of Nishpar Ghar (7,000 feet), talking to a group of Mahsud elders whose village lay at its foot.

To have gone there without their presence would have been unwise, and with conversation they mellowed, whilst on a wooded ridge a Mahsud boy played a shepherd's tune on the flute. We descended from this Arcadia, and under the protection of the fort walls, we closed up into column, whilst the fort's musicians met us with drums and pipes to play us up the steep path with their wild and vigorous music at a pace much faster than seemed necessary, and the men marched through the gate with all the swagger a Pathan could muster.

The most surprising things could happen during a gasht, but surely none more surprising than being presented by a Scout with a small clay pot, sealed with parchment, found in a cleft between rocks. In it were thirty ancient silver coins. This happened to Victor Wainright. He kept one coin, and insisted on the finder keeping the rest to adorn his wife's head-scarf. Wainright's coin was identified by the Curator of Lahore Museum as of White Hun origin, circa 300 AD. On another gasht Wainright was offered and bought some loot from the Amir's palace in Kabul – the insignia of the KCVO, the Order of the Crown of Sweden, the Egyptian Order of the Mejidie and a very ornate Italian Order.

Wainright had an outsize bull terrier named Griffy who loved accompanying him on gasht. Towards the end of a forty-two-mile gasht with the Mounted Infantry, they were dismounted and resting beside the road watching a Ghilzai caravan pass, Wainright with his arm round Griffy for the huge, fierce Ghilzai mastiffs were snarling. When the caravan was about a hundred and fifty yards away, he thought it safe to let Griffy go. Griffy hopped off the culvert and streaked down the road after them, with Wainright, Risaldar Guli Lal and their orderlies in hot pursuit. They arrived just as Griffy had killed the biggest mastiff and was half-way through the next. Wainright was appalled, for the Ghilzai value their dogs, and felt in his pocket for money as compensation. But the senior Ghilzai Malik exclaimed, 'What a dog, Sahib, what a dog! Will you take a hundred rupees for him?'

No armed men moved faster than a Scouts' gasht in a hurry, none kept more silent and still than a Scouts' ambush, known as a chapao. The

Mahsuds claimed as their God-given prey the Derajat villages across the Administered Border. The protection of these was the job of the police and the Frontier Constabulary, but they did not pursue raiders back into Tribal Territory. S. P. Williams was concerned about this. No one could stop raiders going out: they could cross into British India anywhere in twenty-five miles. The time to catch them was on their return, encumbered with loot, hurrying home by the quickest way. If therefore, the Frontier Constabulary could telephone Jandola immediate word of a raid, it might be possible to position ambush parties to intercept the raiders.

Williams mapped out all the likely crossing places and the routes to them from the nearest Scouts post. On word of a raid, the chiga party would immediately pile into lorries and set off to a de-bussing point, then separate into smaller ambush parties and lie in wait on the likely escape routes. It was rather like still-hunting for tiger or panther. Nothing was achieved by moving around; the only way was to lie still and silent for hours on end and let the raiders do the moving. Sometimes the raiders would not cross at once, but would lie up for a whole day or two days in the scrub-covered foothills, watching and listening for any sign of chapao, and then cross at night. Often they had a couple of unarmed men moving ahead of the main party, a stick to spring the trap. If they were stopped or shot at in the dark, they responded with loud and injured innocence, 'What, me raiding? Whoever heard of such a thing? I've just been visiting friends.' So the crafty ambush commander would let the first two men through and reserve for the main body a volley at fifteen yards.

Scouts and raiders grew extremely cunning. Sitting by a leopard kill, the hunter would know a leopard was somewhere near watching, waiting; and sometimes it could be tricked by getting up, walking noisily away and then very quietly creeping back. S. P. Williams tried this in 1924. It worked: watchers had given the all-clear; twelve raiders came jauntily through with their loot, and were all shot or captured. But for one success there were half-a-dozen failures, days and nights lying under a blazing sun or shivering in the cold, sipping from time to time at tepid water, nibbling at a chupatti – only to hear that the quarry had slipped by, half a mile away.

There were occasional unfortunate episodes, as when the volley was answered by a shout instantly identifiable as one of outrage and injured innocence. The beam of an officer's torch revealed a very angry greybeard, his groaning wife and a camel in its death-throes. Abject apologies for shooting the lady were brushed aside – 'She was too old.'

Then, realising all too late the possibilities of compensation, her husband added, 'But the camel was a *very* good one.'

However, the success-rate was enough to make raiding into British India an unprofitable investment, and by the late 1920s it had almost stopped.

In 1929 Williams was succeeded by Johnnie Johnson, a determined and remarkable man, small, dark and taciturn, not popular, who had won the MM as a trooper in a cavalry regiment at Mons. He was a hard taskmaster, and believed above all in the element of surprise. At Sarwekai after dinner one hot August night he told Benjie Bromhead to take the 2nd Wing to Jandola at once.

He asked me when I could start, and I said in half an hour's time as the men would already have turned in, the bedding had to be rolled and stacked for transport by lorry. We were told to avoid the road and make for the Mastang. We slipped out of the chiga gate and started our cross-country journey. The night was airless and after a few hours of rough going our shirts clung to our backs. Eventually we began to climb over the shoulder of the mountain between the Khuzma Pass and the Khar Gundai, a long steep climb. From the summit we dropped into the deep darkness of the Mastang, and so down to Chagmalai as dawn was breaking. From there to Jandola was easy going and we were glad to reach its walls. Johnnie was at breakfast after motoring down, with Vivian Crapp, the Adjutant. I said, 'Good morning', and sat down. Johnnie as usual said nothing except to reply to my greeting, but Vivian asked if it had been hot crossing the pass, to which I replied, 'What pass?', and he grinned hugely. But I felt I had passed Johnnie's test.

Johnson's Pushtu was not perfect, and he was not at his best when eloquence was required, for his taciturnity was a drawback, but he had great force of character; he was the sort of person who compelled obedience. He once, with only a small escort, came upon scores of Mahsuds, their war-drums thudding, the young men working themselves up into a fighting frenzy before going off to attack the Wazirs. He walked right into the middle of the pandemonium – and it stopped.

He did not remain long in command of the SWS, but in 1930 went on to be Political Agent, South Waziristan. He was succeeded in command by Nat Cosby, formerly of the Tochi, who became known to the SWS as 'PG', signifying 'pretty good', for he was a master of meiosis, the best performance being only 'pretty good', the coldest day 'pretty cool'.

His Pushtu was vigorous, ungrammatical and idiosyncratic, but no one dared misunderstand him.

A road was being built in 1932 between Ladha and Tiarza, bringing a great deal of money in khassadari and road contracts to the tribe through whose territory it passed. Mahsuds and Wazirs both claimed the land. Cosby wrote:

> To settle this the Political Agent (Johnnie Johnson) decided to demarcate the boundary. For this purpose I took two troops of MI and three infantry platoons. We left Tiarza camp at about 0900 hours and soon reached the edge of a broad nullah crossing the Sparkha plain. We halted there and could see a battle in progress between Mahsuds and Wazirs, the two sides in sangars facing one another across the plain for about 1,000 yards. In the centre on a knoll was a key-sangar about which battle raged furiously. The Wazirs had occupied it in the morning, and the Mahsuds were now trying to retake it. A Mahsud came running up and said that a leading Malik had just been killed. The PA and I sat looking at the ground for a couple of minutes, and then said simultaneously, 'This must be stopped.'
>
> It was decided to get between them at this sangar, and to pull in a certain number of each side as hostages. A covered line of approach to the flank was spotted, and along this the force moved. Dropping the infantry on the edge of the nullah to cover us if things went wrong, the PA and I rode out of the nullah at the head of the two troops of MI and walked the whole procession slowly between the firing lines towards the sangar.
>
> Approaching the Wazir position, I told the MI Risaldar, 'Walk on with the rear troop to the Mahsud position, surround them, dismount and cover them; while I take the leading troop on to the sangar.' The Mahsuds fired three shots close under the horses' heads, and the PA said, 'Shall we gallop?' 'Better keep a steady walking pace,' I replied.
>
> A concealed nullah suddenly disclosed itself in which there were seventy or eighty Wazirs. The PA deliberately stopped to address them, while I got my troop round the key-sangar on the knoll and sent word for the infantry to come up as fast as possible.
>
> I cleared the Wazirs out of the sangar, and then rode back to the PA. As soon as my back was turned, the Wazirs re-occupied the sangar, and had to be turned out again and some MI put in it. Mahsuds had the sangar taped and kept dropping bullets very close to me, but to warn, not to hit me.

> The infantry seemed a longish time coming up, though actually they were moving fast, and were put in position round the edges of the nullah in which the Wazirs were still being harangued by Johnson. When they were in position, I said to him, 'OK, ready'. The PA then told the Wazirs that we proposed to take twenty-five prisoners and disarm them. After a certain amount of discussion, twenty-five representative prisoners were selected and disarmed and started back with the infantry. This all took time. Then came the job of tackling the Mahsuds which, although there were now two troops available, was a much stickier job. It was only after considerable argument that fifteen prisoners were taken and disarmed. It was a slow retirement, some of the men carrying three or four rifles and cartridge belts, others looking after prisoners. We were very relieved to reach the high ground from which we had started.
>
> That afternoon the PA called a Jirga of Mahsuds and Wazirs and worked out terms for a settlement. After these sorts of shows we discuss the happenings rather like a football match, and one of the Mahsud Maliks said reproachfully to me, 'Sahib, you should never have tried that with less than a thousand men.'

Any officer of the South Waziristan Scouts or Zhob Militia, gashting along the Gumal valley during the seasons of Powindah migrations – north-west to the uplands of Central Asia every spring, south-east to the Indus plains every autumn, hundreds of camels swaying along with loads piled high, thousands of sheep and goats herded by long-haired mastiffs who at night would tear to pieces a stranger among the black goat-hair tents – might expect to be greeted by a cheerful hail from an old woman on the back of a tall camel, 'Wotcher, cockie!' or 'What's blowing, mate?'

This was Mary, who forty years earlier in the Australian outback had married a handsome young Afghan working camels for the goldmines. 'Nawaz Gul's my name,' he used to introduce himself, 'but Nose Gul's what the camel-buggers used to call me.' Mary was now the matriarch of the *kirri* (a nomad encampment), held in awe by Scouts, Politicals and Frontier Constabulary alike. The Powindahs had to deposit their rifles at the Frontier Constabulary post when they entered British India, but everyone knew they kept a few hidden in Mary's baggage or under her bed, where no one dared search. The Political Agents were supposed to ensure that she was content in her life-style. She was, and had no regrets. Nor was she the only Australian wife among the Powindah. One died and her bereaved husband, on his way to Bombay, told a Zhob

Militia officer, 'My mother loved her so much that she said to me, "My son, you must go back to Australia and marry another."'

A Political Agent who became more Pathan than Pathans and even turned Moslem was addressing some Powindahs in his impeccable Pushtu on where they might graze and what route they must take. 'And you're not to make trouble with the Wazirs,' he concluded. 'Do you all understand me?' He was distinctly put out when a burly Powindah answered, 'Too right, Bo. We get you.'

The Powindahs, also known by their tribal name, Ghilzai, poured in and out of India through all the frontier passes, the Kharot and Suliman Khel sections using the Gumal route. They traded in Turcoman rugs, wool, horses, dried fruit, ghi, almonds, pistachio nuts, sugar, salt, tea and the products of Russian, British and Indian factories, equally ready to buy or fight their way through the tribes along their route.

Their garments were more voluminous than those of other tribes, with long shirts and waistcoats heavy with embroidery and little discs of mica, a carelessly tied black pagri holding an untidy shock of hair, heavy shoes instead of chaplis, in winter a posteen. The women, savagely handsome, wore skirts to the ankle, black with dark red and blue patterns, striped red and black trousers, and a headcloth, some yards in length, to protect them from sun and cold – but not from the lascivious gaze of men, for they were generally unveiled. To look down from the ruins of Toi Khulla post while a couple of thousand Powindahs were camped for the night was a sight not easily forgotten. Hundreds of fires twinkled in the darkness; there was a steady hum of conversation, broken now and then by louder arguments, by shouts of friend seeking friend and of someone singing a sweet, melancholy song to the music of a lyre-like rabab. Later all was silent. At dawn all was astir again, and the caravan began ploughing through the dust towards India, with horsemen ahead, then the advanced guard of young men on foot, finally the main body and rearguard.

For the Zhob Militia they were a major problem, bullying the local tribes and up to any skulduggery. For the SWS the biennial three weeks' camp in the Gumal valley during the migrations was an agreeable change, providing some good duck- and partridge-shooting in the autumn, and enough incident to hold boredom at bay.

It need hardly be said that the Powindahs hated Mahsuds: everyone did. There was also friction with the Wazirs, mainly over grazing. The Powindahs were not above kidnapping Wazir children to keep as slaves or sell in Kabul – but that was a game two could play. It was therefore a job for the SWS to see that both sides behaved themselves, and on the

whole the Powindahs respected the forces of the Sarkar which could at any time ruin them by stopping their migration to their winter grazing. Sometimes, however, the men of the kirris, rude and truculent, fired on scouts, mistaking or pretending to mistake them for Wazirs. There would follow violent altercations, conducted amid hordes of shrieking women, mastiffs barking and snarling, camels, goats and horses all milling round in choking clouds of dust.

When Benjie Bromhead was at Sarwekai in 1930,

> Rumours spread that the Wazirs intended to hold the Gwalerai Kotal to prevent the passage of a Powindah qafila. I was sent ahead with a troop of MI while Jock Scotland followed with the main gasht bringing reserve ammunition and rations. We found a dozen Mahsud Khassadars in the ruins of the old Militia fort at Khajuri Kach, sunning themselves like lizards, while outside the fort a dead sheep, which they were too lazy to move, polluted the air. They said they knew of no rumours – and we moved clear of them and made bivouac.
>
> Jock with the infantry gasht joined us, and we settled into a perimeter camp. An enthusiastic and experimental cook, he undertook the preparation of our evening collation. He called the result his Heart's Delight, a mixture of the contents of our two haversacks, gram, raisins, onions, dried apricots, sardines and bully beef, liberally sprinkled with pepper and with a few green chilis to give it a *je ne sais quoi*, all stewed up in a saucepan.
>
> Afer dark, taking the MI, we started for the Gwalerai Kotal, so as to arrive there first. Riding down the steep slope to the Zhob river, Jock's horse slipping under his weight, we splashed and stumbled through the stream, and began to climb. It was dark, with the pathway a mere ghost of a track, and arriving at the summit, we spread out to dismount, hand over our horses to horseholders and occupy the high ground on either flank.
>
> While it was still dark, we heard movement and hailed the intruders. They introduced themselves hoarsely as Suliman Khel, sent forward to secure the pass. We said we were Militia,* at which they were relieved.
>
> At dawn came the leading parties of the kirri, composed at first of camels carrying their camping paraphernalia, and their escort, together with women to cook. There followed more women, and

* The tribesmen still used the old name, 'Militia'.

children, and babies with heads nodding to the rhythm of the camels walk, and flock after flock of sheep and goats spilling down the narrow way. A laughing girl, slim as a lance, her man's rifle slung across her back, jumped nimbly from rock to rock, shepherding the flock. Some women sat and rested on the narrow ledge across the path from us. An elderly woman, staff in hand, came slowly to the top and greeted her sisters. She had the patrician features of a *grande dame* – they are a handsome race. They eyed us curiously, discussing our appearance – dressed as Pathans but walking as Faranghis. There was the sound of distant shots from the foot of the pass, and presently word came that a Powindah boy had been kidnapped by Wazirs.

We mounted and rode down the track. Fortunately the bulk of the qafila had passed, leaving our way clear. At the bottom we were told the boy had been taken up a side ravine which we followed to a place called Bunoke, 'rather a smell', because of the sulphur spring there. On a low spur above the stream was an encampment of Wazirs with their low black tents. There were women and livestock, but few men about. We told them we had come to fetch the kidnapped boy, at which they feigned ignorance. So, having taken up suitable positions, Jock told them he would drive off their livestock and take such men as were within our grasp. There was a pause for consideration, and to our relief a party of men came down the hillside with the boy, a strong youth of about fifteen.

Mounting him on the back of a horse, we set off at a trot. After a time the youth, unaccustomed to the jolting, begged to be allowed to dismount, and for the rest of the long way back to Khajuri Kach he padded happily alongside, holding a stirrup. He told us he had been tending sheep at the rear of the qafila when Wazirs fired, killing one sheep. His brother had gone on with the rest of the flock and he had stayed to skin the carcase, becoming so absorbed in his task that he had not noticed the approach of some Wazirs who fired to scare him and took him prisoner.

Everyone, including the Powindahs, was pleased with the day's work, but their head Malik exploded when a message arrived from the PA to say he would have to go back to Tank. He made a noise like a punctured tyre, an indignant 'paugh', which only Jock could imitate.

Jock had to return to Sarwekai, and I was left in case of further incident. The days were spent in exploring the empty countryside, an immensity of bare rocks and desolation. News came that another Suliman Khel qafila was on its way, and they were said to have

kidnapped a Wazir boy. So we set out for the Gwalerai Kotal to intercept them, only to find that they had taken another route. This was foolish, for their guilt now seemed certain. We found them as their leading parties reached the plain, while their main body and flocks were streaming down another track over a subsidiary pass.

Climbing up against the flood, we esconsed ourselves on a spur by the track and asked for their headman. They replied that he was following so we waited. He came, a small unimpressive man for a Powindah who are often burly people, but he was as garrulous as all his tribe. We talked with him for some time before asking him about the Wazir boy. He seemed to ponder as to what sort of creature a Wazir boy might be, and denied all knowledge. He made as though to leave, but we detained him until the whole qafila had passed. We then told him we would exchange him for the Wazir, and that he must accompany us.

Protesting, he was lifted onto a horse, and we rode with him to a place outside the kirri. Leaving him with the MI and taking an escort, I rode into the encampment and explained our predicament, telling them that their headman would be exchanged for the Wazir boy. There was much indignation and a pantomime of injured innocence. Among the nomads stood the bulky figure of a Hindu merchant, dark-featured, dressed in black and armed to the teeth, a surprising and most vehement man. The argument continued and tempers became frayed, so I told them the encampment would have to be searched, and sent a galloper off to fetch the infantry gasht. After a tense wait, dots appeared spreading quickly out across the plain from the camp two miles away. It was not until the Powindahs saw that the gasht was moving towards us fast that an angry man produced the Wazir boy who was hidden in a nearby ravine. They were in no position to oppose us, but with tempers high there might have been an accident. Taking the Wazir boy, we released the disgruntled Malik at a suitable distance and retired.

A year later, in 1931, FitzMaurice was on Powindah gasht.

Thousands of Suliman Khel streaming up the Gumal. We were heavily fired on, 200 shots. The Suliman Khel said they were sorry, but they were excited and frightened. Leaving one platoon on high ground, I went down among the Suliman Khel with two platoons. I tried to find the Maliks to get an explanation for the firing. We took six or seven hostages but were surrounded by hundreds of excited

Suliman Khel who shouted at us to get out or a real battle would start. The situation looked ugly, and Khan Baz muttered, 'For God's sake, Sahib, let's get out of this quick.'

I sent off a pigeon message and dug in at Toi Kullah, leaving the Suliman Khel kirri in the Gumal. We were reinforced by Cosby and Draycott with six platoons at dusk. The Scouts took up a position astride the Gumal. There was a good deal of confusion and firing during the night and some Suliman Khel broke through. They were later stopped, for the loss of only one camel, by firing a Vicker's gun brought out from Sarwekai, in long bursts across their bows.

The following day 'We baramptaed twenty-five Suliman Khel identified by Khan Baz and me. The PA was glad that we had not returned fire, as this would have caused a general conflagration.'

The word 'barampta', like 'gasht', is richly suggestive, almost onomatopoeic. It suggests a pounce, which indeed it is, in order to grab known hostiles, or hostages to be held until the tribe paid a fine levied on it, or livestock to be held in order to expedite a Jirga's deliberations.

Several platoons would set out at night, silent, wearing grass sandals, and surround the village before first light. When in the early morning the inhabitants came out to relieve themselves, the Scouts would stand up to show there was no escape. The next move in the game was for the village elders to emerge, their faces eloquent of bewilderment and injured innocence. Shaking hands with the Political Agent and senior Scouts officers, they would exchange the conventional greetings. 'May you not be tired . . . May you not be poor . . . Are you well? . . . Are you happy? . . . Is your disposition good?'

After these tender enquiries, 'But what have we poor villagers done? Why is the Militia surrounding our village?'

If the object was merely to round up some eminent citizens in order to give the Jirga a sense of urgency, there would be little trouble; the rules of the game were well understood: the hostages would come to no harm. The worst the Scouts could then expect was a horde of women screeching insults accompanied by unseemly gestures. 'Come on, rape us all now . . . you've taken our men, so you'd be quite safe . . . What are you waiting for? . . . Are you afraid of us? . . . Are you all eunuchs?' But if the quarry was a wanted man who had sought asylum with them, the village notables were obliged by the Pukhtunwali code at least to obstruct in every possible way, and a long argument would ensue.

Eventually it might be agreed that a British officer, a Scouts Subadar,

a Khassadar and an Assistant Political Agent might conduct the search, of everywhere, Sahib, but the women's purdah quarters.'

'No. Of everywhere.'

There would be another long argument, and at last that would be conceded too, the women having been moved out and herded together apart from the men. It was dangerous, poking about in half-dark rooms, going through doors behind which there might well be a Ghazi dedicated to death and determined to take a Faranghi with him. But generally the bird had flown, or had never been there at all. Sometimes, however, the Scouts had a stroke of luck. There was a SWS officer, Major E. E. 'Balu' French, plump, pink-and-white, rather soft in appearance but hard as nails, a perfectionist with an eye for detail like a hospital matron's. ('One against nine hundred,' he would say of his efforts to make his Wing as methodical as himself.) On one barampta he cast an eye over the village damsels – and noticed one. 'Her feet beneath the petticoat like little mice peeped in and out': but these feet were far from little; they were suspiciously large. He insisted, against loud protests, that she unveil, which disclosed the bushy beard and well-known features of No. 3 on the Wanted List. Further investigation, on the same lines, disclosed several more wanted men. French's subalterns were impressed: they had not thought of him as a connoisseur.

Benjie Bromhead took part in a very complicated barampta in 1930 of the predatory Jalal Khel, in their winter quarters in the Mastang.

Ambrose with the main gasht would search the caves and collect any wanted individuals and livestock. A separate gasht under Gilbert would occupy the attention of the Jalal Khel in the Girni. A gasht under FitzMaurice was to cut across the high ground overlooking the junction of the Tormandu and Mastang nullahs. Lastly, I was to take a gasht up to the eastern end of the Girni Sar, separating the Jalal Khel in the Mastang from those in the Girni area. We were to be in position by dawn.

The following night we set off on our various ways in darkness and in complete silence, wearing grass chaplis. It was steep going and a climb of more than 2,000 feet, but we neared the top as dawn came into the sky. This was lucky, as a short distance from the top a length of cliff barred our way. The men made light of it, but I needed a hand crossing the narrow ledge, which would have been dangerous in the dark.

Our destination was a foot-track connecting the Mastang and the Girni. Above it and beyond was the narrow ridge which formed the

crest of the cliffs of Girni Sar. Perched on this was a lonely shelter in which we found a greybeard and his ancient wife, and with them a minute cow like a Black Kerry. We left them in peace with a party to watch them and our flank, and ourselves settled across the pathway. Beneath us the Mastang was still dark, and far below to the east the plains stretched asleep like a pale sea.

Daylight spread slowly to the folds and valleys of the mountain. A track skirted the shoulder, and where this topped the crest a man stood. A spare man, bearded, his hair worn long to the nape of his neck, held loosely by a greasy black rag tied ropewise, his garments once white, now so grey with dirt that they merged with the rock. He gazed downwards to where the hillside eased into the head of a narrow valley where water glinted. To one side lay a group of black tents, near them a circle of thorn hedge from whose protection sheep were slowly moving, shepherded by a boy whose cries rose to us. The man lifted his voice, cupping his hand, and shouted a long clear call. Soon figures appeared, gazing, their voices sharp and questioning. The man on the hill waved a cloth above his head and pointing eastwards with his rifle, arm outstretched, shouted 'Oh hee, Zarif Khan, the jackals have come. The Militia are round my village!'

The first sign that the search had started was the appearance of a Mahsud, gasping for breath, who ran up the steep path straight into our arms. We asked him why he was in such a hurry, and he answered bitterly, 'The jackals have come,' and spat, at which one of the men struck him across the face. We were cold, had spent a long night climbing, and were in no mood for insults.

In the Mastang Ambrose and the main gasht had taken the Jalal Khel by surprise. Ambrose, who was never at a loss when confronted by the opposite sex, while searching a cave had a greasy cloth hurled at him by an infuriated woman. He returned it to her, and it was thrown back with added venom. His orderly, not to be outdone in politeness, gave it back to her again, whereupon the poor woman collapsed in feminine hysterics.

There was no shooting, for the Jalal Khel had been caught off balance. The main gasht collected all the able-bodied men and livestock and started their retreat, slowed down by prisoners and animals.

The following morning Bromhead was on road-protection gasht.

We met a group of men making for the Mastang. One proved to be Khawas, the leading Malik of the Jalal Khel, who had been released

by the PA to restrain the tribe from mischief. He was a strong, bearded man with the presence of a leader. After shaking hands and an exchange of greetings, he asked if I had taken part in the barampta and where I had been. On my pointing to the end of the cliff summit of the Girni Sar, he nodded, almost as if in approval, and then asked me not to patrol too close to the Mastang as feelings were high. He seemed satisfied that we were only there to protect the road, and left us, impressed by his personality.

The Ahmedzai Wazirs round Wana had taken to murdering loyal Maliks so the Political Agent instructed Nat Cosby, commanding the SWS, to barampta a village north of Wana and collect three wanted men.

At first light I put the MI in, to encircle the village, dismount and face inwards. I held the infantry in reserve. The wanted men were in a walled-in fort with large wooden doors. I approached the doors with the Naib* Tahsildar and called 'Open up!' From within someone asked, 'Who is in command?' and the Naib Tahsildar replied, 'Cosby Sahib. He wants Israr Gul, Sharif Ali and Hassan Gul.'

There was some muttering and Hassan Gul came out. I asked 'Where are the other two?' and after a little more delay, out came Sharif Ali. I asked, 'Where is Israr Gul?' They replied, 'He has gone out for the purposes of nature and not come back.' 'Right,' I said, 'then we'll break the door down.'

On this he emerged, came up to me and shook my hand which was holding a pistol and asked with much concern, '*Jor ye? Khushal ye?*'† This is all part of the game, understood by us all. Also always to stand back at the side of the door while talking to anyone inside, as they sometimes fire through the door. The men we took were unarmed, but where there are men, there are rifles, so our next job was to search the place. We looked in the roof and other usual hiding places, but drew blank. Then I stopped near a manger where some chickens were sitting, and a woman said to me, 'You wouldn't harm the poor chickens, Sahib.' I said, 'Search in that manger,' and the rifles were there all right, hidden under the hay. The three men were sentenced to imprisonment, and the murders ceased.

* A junior Political officer.

† 'Are you well? Are you happy?'

Scouts did not like baramptas, which were dangerous and always accompanied by a barrage of the foulest abuse from the women to which, oddly enough, Pathan officers were more abashed than British officers, perhaps because they understood more of it. One of the difficulties for British officers in Waziristan was the Mahsud, and to a lesser degree the Wazir, dialect. They had learned for examination purposes, the classical Pushtu – or, rather, Pakhtu – of Peshawar – or rather, Pekhawur – which, with local variations, is spoken by the northern tribes, and perfectly understood by most Scouts. But not merely did Mahsuds and Wazirs turn *kh* into *sh*; they made many other consonants and vowel changes, and had innumerable words and expressions peculiar to themselves. With a little practice one could cope with one or two *mulaqatis* – men who came in with petitions, complaints or just to pass the time of day; but a Jirga was far more difficult with disrespectful interruptions from citizens in the back row whose only object was to obstruct and annoy. However, even in a Jirga an officer usually had at his side an experienced, Mahsud-speaking Tahsildar or Subadar to whom he could turn if in difficulty. No such support was available in an altercation with a mob of screaming harridans: modesty forbade any translation of their remarks.

Lucky the officer who could reply in kind, but this was easier said than done. Pushtu is a language replete with unseemly proverbs and onomatapoea (*daz* is a shot, *poos* is a silent fart); but not only must he who aspires to answering back know the appropriate retort, he must know also the appropriate occasion to use it. To take an example, in purely male company one could observe cynically, '*Khuzza na takht ghwari, na bakht ghwari, kho ghain sakht ghwari*',* and be rewarded by Rabelaisian, male chauvinist chuckles. But such an observation directed at an infuriated virago in the presence of her male relatives might be one of those things which are better left unsaid. But some officers scored. Hugh Pettigrew, flagrantly improvising, silenced a screeching fury by bawling at her, 'Shut up, you pregnant old hen!' and Balu French demolished a contumacious Malik, who seemed to be getting the better of an argument, by the inspired throw-away line, 'Every man thinks his prick is as big as a carrot.'

Denis Ambrose, having served his apprenticeship in the SWS, went on to command the Tochi Scouts. He understood the strengths and limitations of Scouts; he was cool and clear-minded, but an opportunist. (He later made a fortune in the United States.) He was thought to

* 'A woman doesn't want a throne, and doesn't want good fortune, all she wants is ... [something quite unmentionable in polite company]'

be rather unapproachable, but his Adjutant, Harry Garland, 'liked him very much. He was considerate, even though he really did work one extremely hard. He was perhaps the most efficient officer of that rank I ever met, and every moment of being his adjutant was tremendous fun, for he certainly kept me on my toes.'

He was determined to make the Tore Oba Ghilzais smart for shooting up a gasht, killing two and wounding three. Victor Wainwright, commanding at Spinwam, reported that they were on their way back from India. 'Vewwy intewesting,' said Ambrose, 'Geoffwey [Keating] and I will do a gasht with you.'

He smoked like a chimney and took no conventional exercise other than a stroll round 'the Drill' or the gardens. But he led that gasht 'well over forty miles,' said Wainwright.

And when near the end I timed him, he was still doing 140 paces to the minute. There followed a Pathan officers' tikala. I, aged twenty-four, was fairly creased and ready for early bed. These two, nearly forty, were prepared to sit up all night with Denis Ambrose playing the piano, provided there was a bottle of champagne and a glass on it, preferably classical but anything (except bawdy) for anyone who wanted to sing.

The sequel to this gasht was a barampta on the Tore Oba which netted one hundred and fifty camels. But Ambrose was still not satisfied; he insisted on the Maliks making formal apology in the middle of a hollow square of Scouts. They were told that if they ever shot at a Tochi gasht again they would not get off so lightly. They never did.

Khassadars often accompanied gashts and assisted at baramptas. Their local knowledge was useful, but they were never made privy to plans beforehand. The most reliable, some would say the only reliable one, was Subadar of Khassadars in the Utmanzai Wazir country, Darim Khan, Manzar Khel, who had won the Indian Order of Merit with the Militia in 1915 and later the Croix de Guerre. Only once was he absent without leave, when the Afghans were toppling the unpopular usurper, Bacha Saquao. Darim then made his way to Kabul and returned with the jackpot – a Holland and Holland stalking-rifle, with telescopic sight, from the royal palace. Unfortunately it did not take ·303 ammunition, so he used to badger every officer to buy ·280 cartridges for him. He was a small man, tough and wiry, with an endearing habit of chuckling into his beard. With rifle slung, pistol low on his hip,

knife-hilt to the right of his neck ready for a quick draw, he was a frequent visitor to the officer commanding Datta Khel post, bringing the latest news. He did not, like most tribesmen, prolong the visit *ad infinitum*; when he had had his say (always to the point) and drunk his tea, without waiting for 'the permission' he would get up abruptly and depart. For twenty-five years he was a tower of strength in North Waziristan, always ready with good advice, information and action, resisting with dauntless courage the complex political, religious and social pressures on a man in his position when war flared up in 1936. He hated, and was hated by, the Faqir of Ipi, the leading hostile. To his grief his son, Mohamad Khan, commonly known as 'Gingat' (Dung beetle) was at variance with the Political Agent, and joined the lashkar which demanded the surrender of Darim's Khassadar post. In the course of an altercation, Gingat shot one of his cousins, whereupon Darim, lightning-quick on the draw, shot Gingat, but to wound, not to kill. Gingat was later reconciled to his father and to the Political Agent. One constantly reads in reports, 'Darim's opinion is that . . . Darim's piqueting arrangements were very effective . . . Owing to pressure brought by Darim, the outlaw Bararai came in to settle with the political authorities.' And so on.

Another good Khassadar was Ahwaz Khan, a hefty man with a permanent stubble on his chin. Of a Mahsud family who were hamsayas of the Tori Khel Wazirs, he got on well with both tribes. He spoke some English, and was popular with British troops who knew him as 'George'. One day he was escorting a three-car convoy from Bannu to Razmak when the second car was fired on, one officer, a sergeant and the driver being killed, and another officer wounded. 'George' at once stopped the leading car, which could have been driven to safety, and engaged the gang, defending the wounded officer until help arrived. On another occasion, when the Sappers had failed to defuse a 250-lb aircraft bomb placed to blow up a culvert, George tied his pagri round it and pulled it away. He was awarded the Albert Medal, later exchanged for the appropriately named George Medal. After being invested with it at Government House, he put on a sort of Jeeves act and bustled round handing out cigarettes and drinks. With all the appearance of a cheerful rogue, he was a brave and honest man.

10

A Sort of Peace, 1930–6

In the early 1930s a certain complacency about the Frontier became discernible, an almost reluctant belief that, with planes, light armour, improved mountain artillery, a higher scale of light machine-guns, the scales were so heavily weighted against him that the poor old Pathan would be reduced to a little long-range sniping. A pity, really, but that was progress. The events of the next decade were to correct these ideas. Keen young officers who were disappointed that the Frontier was not all it was cracked up to be, discovered that indeed it was.

The trouble originated in British India, in the prosperous districts of Peshawar, Nowshera and Kohat. In 1929 an organisation was formed called the Frontier Youth League which soon adopted a type of political uniform then fashionable and became known as Redshirts. Ostensibly dedicated to social and religious improvement, in fact it was highly seditious and tried to set up a parallel administration, levying its own taxes and setting up its own courts to punish, with fines and flogging, breaches of its own law. Its leaders were Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his brother, Dr Khan Sahib, formerly a Medical Officer of the Guides. In 1930 the Redshirts were responsible for savage rioting in Peshawar city, during which an armoured car and its occupants were incinerated. The movement never really caught on in Tribal Territory, because it was incongruously affiliated to the Hindu-dominated Congress, but there were Congress propagandists among the tribes, and hostile lashkars occasionally sported Congress flags. The Afridis and Mamunds, a small tough tribe from the mountains north of Peshawar, took advantage of the situation to come down to the

outskirts of Peshawar, invade the Government Supply Depot and [illegible] roads.

Although it was well outside their area, the Scouts became involved. The Inspecting Officer Frontier Corps, Colonel Scott, was one of a law-and-order quadrumvirate in Peshawar; he sent for Nat Cosby to [illegible] as his staff officer, and for detachments of the Tochi Scouts, SWS and Kurram Militia. Cosby wrote:

> When I arrived in Peshawar, it was panic stations. The DC, a young ICS fellow, could not face up to opposition. The Brigade Commander didn't know how to cope. At the conference it was my boss, the IOFC, a tough old bird, and the Inspector General of Police who kept things going on the right lines. One evening the IOFC greeted me with, 'Pack your pyjamas. We've got to spend the night at Government House.' On arrival we found a regular arsenal of weapons on the billiards table. However, the night passed quietly.

One lashkar settled itself in a deep ravine, the Zhindai Khwar, honeycombed with caves, just inside Tribal Territory close to a village called Palli. A composite force of two hundred rifles of the SWS, half Bhitannis, half Bangash, and one hundred of the Kurram Militia were sent to eject them and to barampta Palli village, all under command of Colonel Scott.

Benjie Bromhead accompanied the SWS detachment, as second-in-command to Felix Williams.

> We moved into a separate bivouac on the bank of the Swat Canal, a pleasant shady place. With us was old Colonel Scott, a tough leathery man to whom comfort mattered little.
>
> On the second night we set out. I was to lead the night march, assisted by two guides. We had been going some time when, from the flank, a bugle, atrociously played, brayed its warning. We stopped for a moment and Colonel Scott, who was deaf, asked loudly why we had halted. We went on, and when the guides showed a tendency to loiter, we knew we must be nearing Palli.
>
> We came to the edge of a steep-sided ravine and were about to find a way down when below us a party of tribesmen scudded past, silent as a shoal of fish, grey shapes in the moonlight. Our orders were not to fire till we were in position. I hesitated, but as Colonel Scott appeared again demanding loudly why we had halted, we slid down the steep slope into the ravine. We were climbing the far bank when

> fire was opened from ahead, and the men made haste to reach the top, a natural reaction, but old man Scott laid about him with a walking-stick, disapproving such undue haste.
>
> On arriving at the top, Felix went ahead with his party, making for the hills north of Palli, and my party swung right to make for the Zhindai Khwar. Almost at once Felix was fired on from behind a stone wall, but he and his men charged and quickly routed their opponents. About the same time the detachment of the Kurram Militia, who had remained at the ravine which we had just crossed, opened fire on another party of escaping tribesmen. We carried on to the Zhindai Khwar, which appeared a dark chasm at our feet.
>
> Leaving the Bhitannis to cover us, with a platoon of Bangash we scrambled down a steep track into the chasm. It was almost dark and we were glad to find a track which led us out on to the far side. We climbed out and made for a small ridge ahead, the highest ground visible. Beyond lay the village of Palli, a tumble of low houses, and to the north the hill which Felix Williams and his party had occupied, dominating the area at long range.
>
> The Bhitannis followed, and from the depths of the ravine came the sound of firing, echoing and reverberating within its cliffs. My heart sank, but their leading files emerged looking well pleased with themselves, followed by the rest with a handful of prisoners.
>
> The prisoners were placed under the eye of a young Bhitanni sentry in a hollow just below the skyline, and we lay waiting for the daylight. The Bhitannis were in position facing Palli, while the Bangash guarded our flanks. The ground was devoid of cover, and soon from a row of caves in the cliff-side below the village fire was opened on us. It was difficult to see the offenders, so we held our fire. There was a noise from the prisoners behind and, turning, I saw the young Bhitanni sentry with rifle raised, pointing at these unfortunates. He was told to behave himself, and remarked innocently that as we couldn't see the enemy who were firing at us, he might as well frighten those he could see. A Bhitanni nearby said, 'There's a Mahsud!' and fired. It was curious that to him Mahsud and enemy were synonymous: the only Mahsuds anywhere near were two platoons of Kurram Militia.
>
> Nyaz Gul, the Bhitanni Jemadar, then raced to an outcrop of rock facing the caves. It was a brave act, and he ran back unscathed to point out which of the caves the firing was coming from. So we fired on its dark interior and the sniping ceased. There was a pause, and a long silence.

At a point below the village the Zhindai Khwar took a bend [illegible] part of the ravine was visible. A wounded tribesman lay in this [illegible] of ground and the Bhitannis, still equating the poor fellow with [illegible] Mahsud enemies, said callously, 'He will die.' In any case we were [illegible] no position to risk lives to save him.

A figure slid out from the dark doorway of a house on the opposite side of the ravine, bearded like an Assyrian with the appearance of a priest. A Bhitanni, a naive young barbarian, asked, 'May we shoot him?' to which the old Bangash Subadar with some asperity gave an avuncular 'No', and as if aware of the danger, the figure slipped back into the shadow of his door.

We shouted to our opponents in the caves to come out and surrender. After a time a small party emerged and stood on a ledge beneath the caves, whence a track ran up to the village. We called to them that if they surrendered, they would not be harmed. Foolishly they fled up the path into the village and appeared on the far side making for the skyline. They were all shot down except for one man who disappeared over the ridge. For a moment there was silence, then a volley from the Kurram Militia.

After that the sun grew hotter, and as nothing appeared to be happening, I went in search of Colonel Scott's headquarters, taking a small escort and leaving the Bangash Subadar in charge. We found the HQ with old Colonel Scott sprawled in the hot sun on a slab of rock. It would have baked the hide off a lesser man, but he was unconcerned and seemed to enjoy the heat. After we had exchanged what information there was, I returned to the ridge where there was a general air of a rather hot summer outing. After what seemed an interminable wait we were given permission to withdraw, taking our prisoners and one or two wounded tribesmen.

With the lashkars dispersed, the Scouts returned to Waziristan, leaving the Police to deal with the Redshirts whose movement soon faded away.

There was a close relationship between the RAF, later the Indian Air Force, and the Scouts. Scouts officers often flew as observers, and RAF officers rather less frequently took part in gashts. At Miranshah there was an airfield with a resident Flight Officer for liaison with Scouts, and a duty pilot always on stand-by to help a gasht in trouble, Tochi Scouts, Kurram Militia or SWS. So efficient were communications – a carrier pigeon from gasht to fort, thence by telephone or radio to Miranshah –

[illegible] within half an hour of calling for help a gasht could expect a plane overhead.

The Bristol Fighter and Wapiti, later the Audax, biplanes were ideal for the job. They were slow enough for the pilot to stooge round, using little petrol, until he spotted the enemy, strafe them with his fixed machine-gun firing forward, and then swing up and away while the observer had a go over the side. Few tribesmen were killed, but the gasht was encouraged.

If a troublesome village had to be bombed, white leaflets were dropped over it some days before warning the inhabitants of wrath to come on a certain date; the day before the bombing, red leaflets were dropped, and the inhabitants then departed. When it was all over they came back and repaired the damage which, with those small bombs, was not very heavy. No lives were lost, but much inconvenience caused.

The biggest problem was in ground-air communications: a plane could drop a written message, but a gasht could not throw one up. Every section carried two white cotton strips about nine feet long and eighteen inches wide. The sections nearest the enemy, and none other, could spread these in a simple code, viz:

X No enemy action

> Am being fired on from direction of point of V

⊣ Am in dire danger from direction of cross of T, justifying pilot risking his life and aircraft. (Only used when under heavy close range attack.)

In addition, a gasht headquarters usually carried the Popham Panel, a canvas screen which would be spread on the ground with its black and white panels arranged in patterns in a simple code conveying such messages as 'Send ammunition . . . water . . . Very lights . . . medical assistance'.

The best work done by these planes was the dropping, often with improvised equipment, of all kinds of supplies from ammunition and Very lights for a gasht surrounded on a hilltop in the evening, to oysters on ice from Peshawar Club, wrapped in a Lilo mattress, dropped on Biche Kashkai post on Christmas Day. The Tochi Scouts devised a sort of flying haybox in which hot curry and chupattis could be dropped, very welcome to a gasht benighted in winter.

They were used for many other jobs. 'Lotus' Lowis, Assistant Political Agent, Wana in the 1930s, made good use of a plane when the Zilli Khel Mahsuds defied the Political Agent's order not to graze their flocks in British India. From the air he spotted the trespassers, and then

directed the SWS on to them. 'Gashts seized 948 sheep, 8 shepherd rifles.' Two days later, 'Put Skrine's gasht on to 1,200 sheep the o side of Spiro Khan hill. Gasht got them all.' Without a plane, the would never have seen them. Holding these sheep, they could mak Zilli Khel pay a fine. 'Very good effect on Zilli Khel. The Brig Wana, severely criticised me for cruelty to the sheep, but he still p squash with me.'

The Political Agent was said to be the man who stood between soldier and his medal. The Political Department (afterwards know the Indian Political Service) was recruited two-thirds from the In Army and one-third from the Indian Civil Service. As District C missioners they ran the settled districts of the North-West Fron Province; they ran Baluchistan; they staffed the trans-Frontier A cies. Most of them knew the ABC of soldiering, and many h distinguished military records in the First World War. But they w naturally inclined to be biased in favour of *their* Mahsuds and t Wazirs, against the brutal and licentious soldiery, if only becaus entry of the Army on to the scene implied that the situation had g beyond the Political Agent's control. Scouts officers to some ex adopted the Politicals' viewpoint: they, after all, had to live and g and mix with yesterday's enemy after the soldiers had departed.

The head of the political hierarchy on the Frontier reside Peshawar. He wore two hats: he was Chief Commissioner (in 19 upgraded to Governor) of the cis-Frontier districts, but in his deali with Tribal Territory he was Agent to the Governor General (AGG) having under him the Resident, Waziristan, established in Dera Isma Khan, and Political Agents for North Waziristan in Miranshah, Sou Waziristan in Tank, and the Kurram in Parachinar. Under the Politi Agents were Assistant Political Agents, in Wana, Sararogha an Miranshah. Assistant Political Agents and upward were commissione officers if they came from the Army, or covenanted members of th Indian Civil Service. Below them were Tahsildars and Assistan Political Officers. Before the 1914–18 war the Political Agents and th Assistant Political Agents had all been British; after it, an increasing number were Pathans and a few were Indians. The Tahsildars an Assistant Political Officers were all Pathans, but from a different part o the Frontier to that in which they served. There was a similar set-up i Baluchistan. The Political Agents of the Kurram, North Waziristan, South Waziristan and the Zhob each had an irregular corps under his general direction, but not under his operational command. In simple

terms, he told the Scouts or Militia what he wanted done but not how to do it, though the precise relations between them depended, of course, largely on personalities. It was not uncommon for a Scouts officer to officiate as Assistant Political Agent.

One of the most celebrated Frontier politicals was 'Bunch' Parsons, who after six years in the North Waziristan Militia became Political Agent, South Waziristan. There he won a DSO and was badly wounded guiding RAF bombers to hostile villages which they could never have identified without him.

The job of a Political in Waziristan was as dangerous as that of a Scouts officer. Since he must not seem to fear or distance himself from his tribes, he seldom went about his work with Scout or military escort. Normally he was escorted only by Khassadars or tribal badraggas and he could never be certain that they would provoke a blood-feud by defending him against their fellow-tribesmen. The Pukhtunwali code to some extent protected him, since he was usually surrounded by Wazirs or Mahsuds in the role of his hosts. But Mahsuds in particular were notorious for flouting the code. In times of peace, an orderly and a couple of badraggas in the car sufficed for escort, but when tensions were high, as they were in the late 1930s, a Political travelled about with a whole lorry-load of Khassadars. With everyone armed to the teeth, a rose behind the ear, with music and song, the tour of an Assistant Political Agent could be quite a carnival progress.

'Lotus' Lowis, deciding one day that his escort needed exercise, stopped the lorry on a level piece of ground and told them to pick sides for an improvised game of football, refereed by their Jemadar. The referee had not the haziest idea of the rules; when these were briefly explained to him, he made a quick assessment, slipped the whistle into his pocket and strapped on a heavy automatic pistol. Someone must have told him about football 'fans'.

A good Political Agent or Assistant Political Agent spent a great part of his time just talking or listening to tribesmen. Twice a year he had to pay Maliks their allowances at informal, often light and jocular, 'Allowance Jirgas'. The Mahsuds alone had thirty Allowance Jirgas, each attended by up to two dozen Maliks, every one of whom felt he had a right to a private talk with the Political Sahib after the Jirga. In addition there were *mulaqatis* ('mole-cats'), tribesmen who waited on him with petitions or complaints, demands for road or firewood contracts, or just to pass the time of day and to receive a few rupees remuneration on what was, the Political Agent hoped, a generally understood and accepted scale, graded according to each man's import-

ance. Political Agents' diaries are full of such items as 'sixteen mole-cats at office this afternoon', or 'a dozen mole-cats waiting for me at Ibo This was tiring beyond words: only someone who has spent a long da listening to a Mahsud visitor 'will understand the exhaustion whi comes from resistance to his importunings, the effort required to me his plausibility, even the struggle to match his wit'.* This exhaustio was a factor in Frontier affairs: it meant that only a very exceptiona Political Agent, such as Robert Warburton, half Afghan, could remain in one posting for more than about three years, which was hardly long enough to get to know the tribes. But this endless talk, arguing, wari fencing, was absolutely necessary, both to keep his finger on the pulse of the tribes, and to obtain intelligence about the tribes on which Scouts and Army relied.

Broadly speaking, a tribesman could (so far as the Government was concerned) do pretty well what he liked in Tribal Territory so long as he did not do it to Government servants. But there were limits. If a crime was committed in an Army cantonment (Razmak or Wana), or within five hundred yards of a road, or if a non-Pathan was involved, then the case was tried by the Political Agent or his Assistant sitting as a Magistrate, under the Indian Penal Code, the Criminal Procedure Code and the Frontier Crimes Regulations, and sentences up to fourteen years' imprisonment could be awarded. If there was not sufficient evidence for a Court, then the case could be referred to a Jirga. If a crime was committed within a Protected Area (roughly five miles round an Army cantonment or Scouts' post), then again the case was referred to a Jirga. 'Referring to a Jirga' meant framing the charge and referring it to about four Assessors of the Accused's own tribe, for trial either by the Shariat (Moslem Law) or by Rewaj (Tribal custom). Four or five specific questions would be put to the Assessors, e.g. Did A shoot B? Where? When? Why? What recommendations do you make?

The Assessors, representing the Jirga, might consider the Accused guilty and recommend a fine of, say, 5,000 rupees. If he paid up, well and good. If not, then his livestock, or the livestock of his family or section, might be baramptaed. If there was insufficient evidence against an individual, or he took a hundred oaths of innocence, or had departed to Afghanistan, then the Political Agent would fine his family or section, ordering a barampta if they failed to pay up.

The barampta might be a complex operation of a dozen platoons with cordon, covering party, reserve and search-party to round up the tribe's

* Sir Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans*, page 404.

eminent citizens who would not be released until the case was concluded, and whose relatives would use their influence with the Jirga to expedite proceedings. Or it might not amount to more than a platoon driving a flock of goats into the post perimeter and telling the goat-boys, 'Be off, now, and tell your dads the Militia are very hungry. They'll eat a goat a day until the Jirga settle the case.' The holding of livestock on rapidly diminishing grazing wonderfully concentrated the Jirga's mind.

A blockade might be imposed, cutting off an offending tribe from its trade with British India or preventing its annual migration to winter grazing. Only if all these failed, would the Army mount a punitive operation; or the RAF bomb the fortified towers of the offender.

Essentially the Scouts' job was to lend muscle to the Political Agent's wishes. For an example of how it worked, take the case of the murder of Captain Roy Beatty, an officer of the Tochi Scouts acting as Assistant Political Agent in North Waziristan.

In 1936 a Madda Khel Wazir named Zawel was flogged by the Afghan authorities for robbery, taunted with robbing only Moslems, and challenged to try his courage on a Faranghi. Smarting under this treatment, he collected a gang of seven Madda Khel worse than himself, ascertained when Beatty would be taking the Khassadars' pay and laid an ambush at a sharp bend in the road where the car must slow down. Beatty and two of his escort were killed, one Khassadar and his clerk wounded. By the time his escorting Khassadar lorry arrived, Zawel and his gang had got away with 32,000 rupees, three rifles and a revolver.

The Political Agent then went into action. First he laid on a Scout barampta which netted ninety eminent Madda Khel. Then he called upon the Jirga to hand over the gang. Meanwhile he held in his hand a strong card: in 1934 one hundred Madda Khel rifles had been taken from them as surety for good conduct for one year. In 1935, 1936 and 1937 the Madda Khel's conduct had been far from good, so the hundred rifles, held as surety, were then confiscated; but the Jirga complained of sharp practice by the Sarkar and, after some argument, the Political Agent conceded that the rifles would not be confiscated but would continue to be held as surety for good behaviour. There they were, still in the Bannu armoury, available if the Government thought it politic to use the carrot rather than the stick.

Under pressure from the relatives of the hostages taken in the barampta, and stimulated by air-action against the villages which were harbouring the gang, the Jirga brought to trial the three least important members. But prosecution witnesses failed to turn up, the three

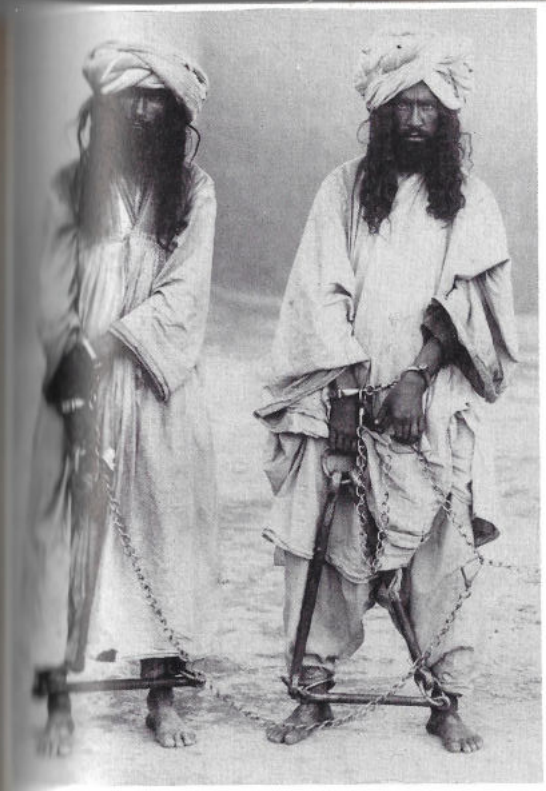
accused took a hundred oaths of innocence and were released. Zawa and the other four, said the Jirga, were in Afghanistan. Forty of the hostages were released, but fifty more rifles were taken as surety for a final settlement. This settlement eventually comprised a fine of 25,000 rupees, as well as the return of the 32,000 rupees which had been stolen, plus fifty more rifles. Madda Khel timber contractors paid most of the money and those hundred rifles, taken in 1934, were accepted as payment of the balance. The remaining hostages were then released.

Often affairs were complicated by the action of the Afghan authorities who were seldom conspicuously helpful. In 1937 a gasht of Tochi Scouts, infantry and Mounted Infantry, under Denis Ambrose and Balu French, escorted the Resident, Waziristan, Colonel 'Bunch' Parsons, on a tour of his parish. To make a point, they went right up to the Durand Line and were there fired upon, from across the border, by Tannis, an Afghan tribe, and by Dawegar Saidgis on the Indian side. It was a time when it seemed particularly important not to annoy the Afghans, so the gasht prudently withdrew with only a couple of men wounded.

Delhi then sent a strong protest to Kabul; Kabul replied with regrets that the esteemed Colonel Parsons had been incommoded and 'proof' that the Scouts had invaded Afghanistan, massacring, wounding and raping peaceful citizens. To avoid such deplorable events in future, suggested the 'God-given Government', would it not be wise for the Afghan authorities to be given prior notice of every military force approaching the Durand Line? For obvious reasons, it would not. His Britannic Majesty's Ambassador in Kabul then weighed in with some unhelpful observations, implying that he swallowed the Afghan case hook, line and sinker; it was decided, therefore, that nothing more would be done about the Tannis. The Dawegai Saidgis, however, a small tribe not usually obstreperous, had been downright impertinent. So they were blockaded, cut off from all trade with India, their livestock prevented from moving to greener pastures, until the culprits were tried by the Jirga and duly acquitted after taking oaths of innocence. Eventually the tribe was punished by a fine of 500 rupees – hardly vindictive.

It was a curious way to run a turbulent frontier, and not one that would have been followed by Russians or Americans. But it worked – in a sort of way.

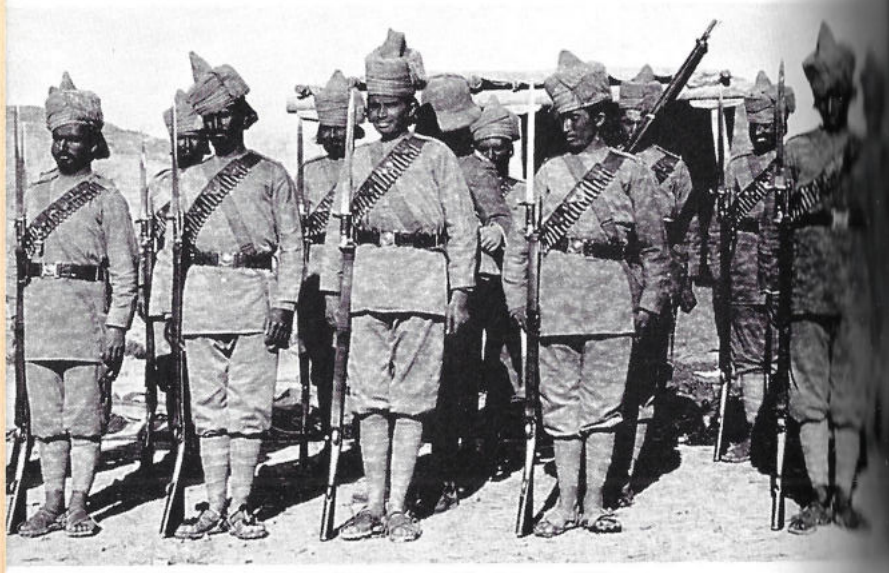
It was obvious that no Scouts post could fall to tribesmen armed only with rifles unless the garrison was treacherous or amazingly incom-



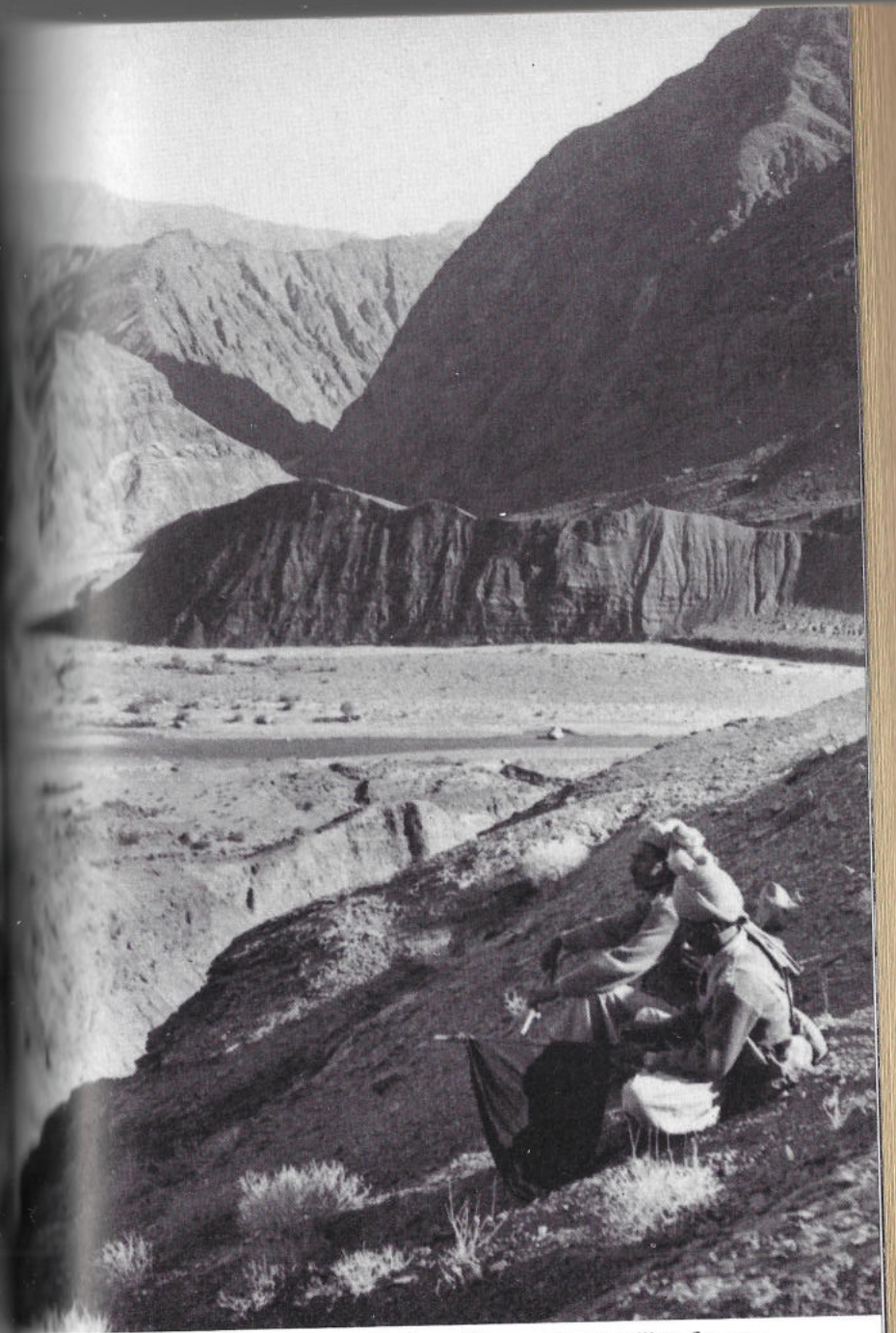
1. (*left*), Captured Zhob raiders

2. (*below*), Raw material for the Zhob Militia, Baluchi tribesmen *c.* 1900

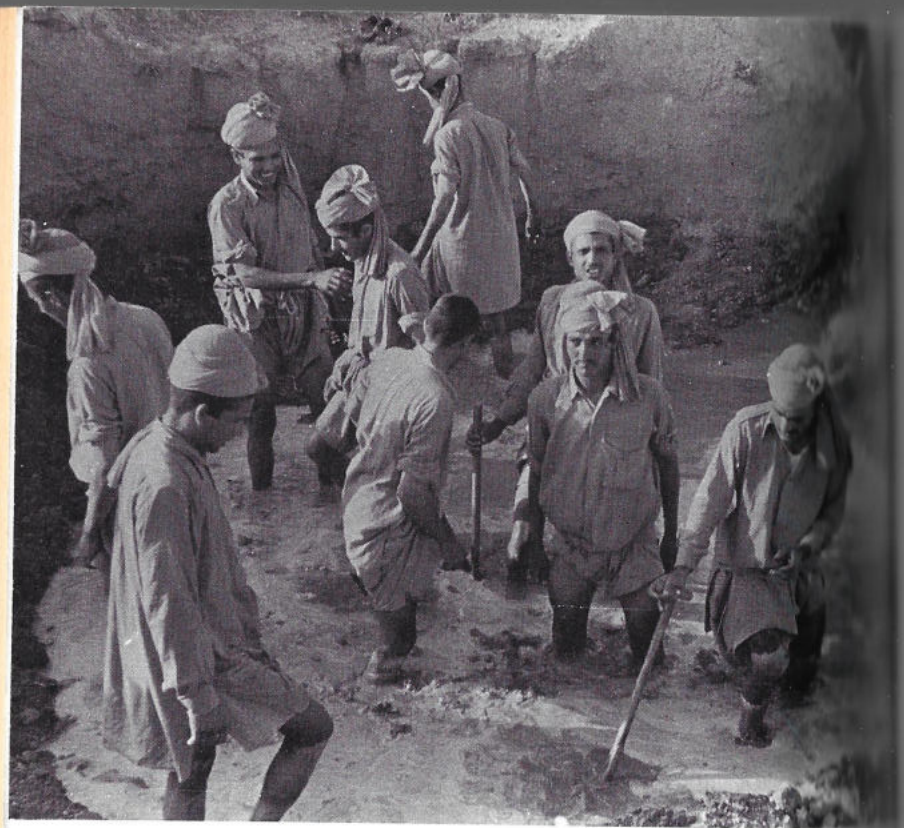
3. A Wazir Malik



4. The South Waziristan Militia *c.* 1905



South Waziristan Scouts: two Pathan officers with signalling flags on
ught, overlooking the Gumal River

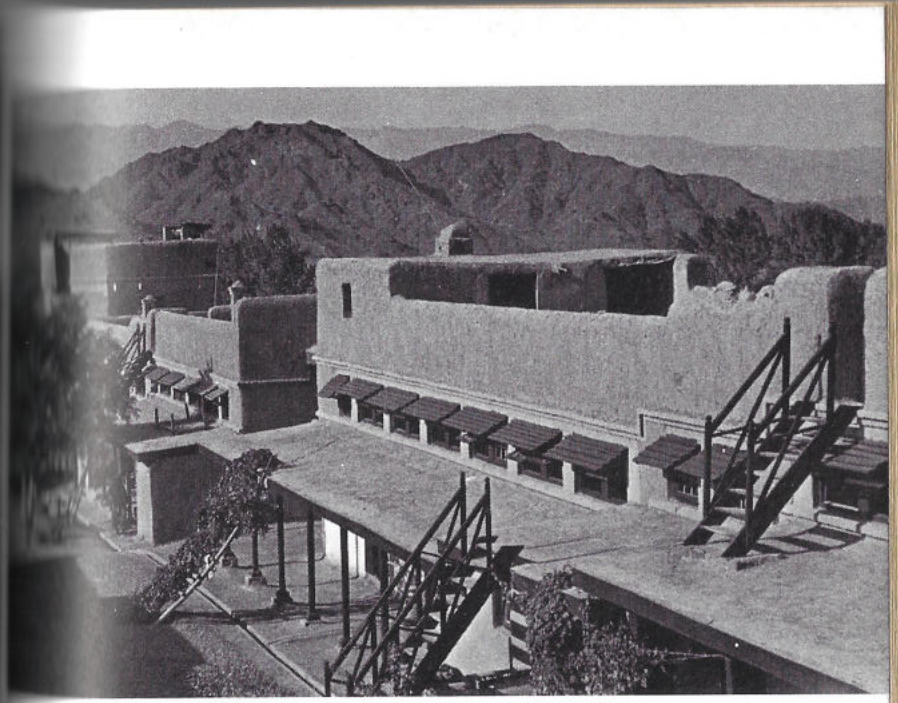


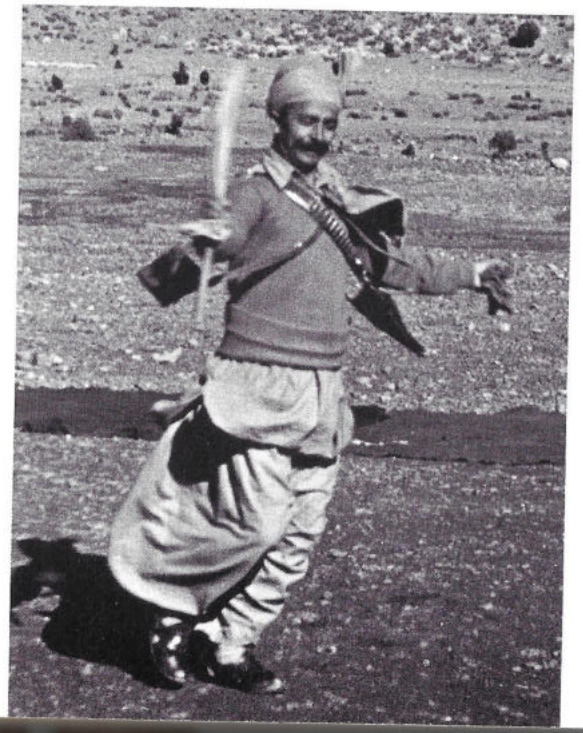
(left), Tochi Scouts:
lling mud for building

(below left), South
iristan Scouts Mounted
ntry, in a hurry

(right), Gilgit Scouts:
t on the Hoof,' a
bagged on gasht

(below), The Wakhan
of the Kotgaz Pass



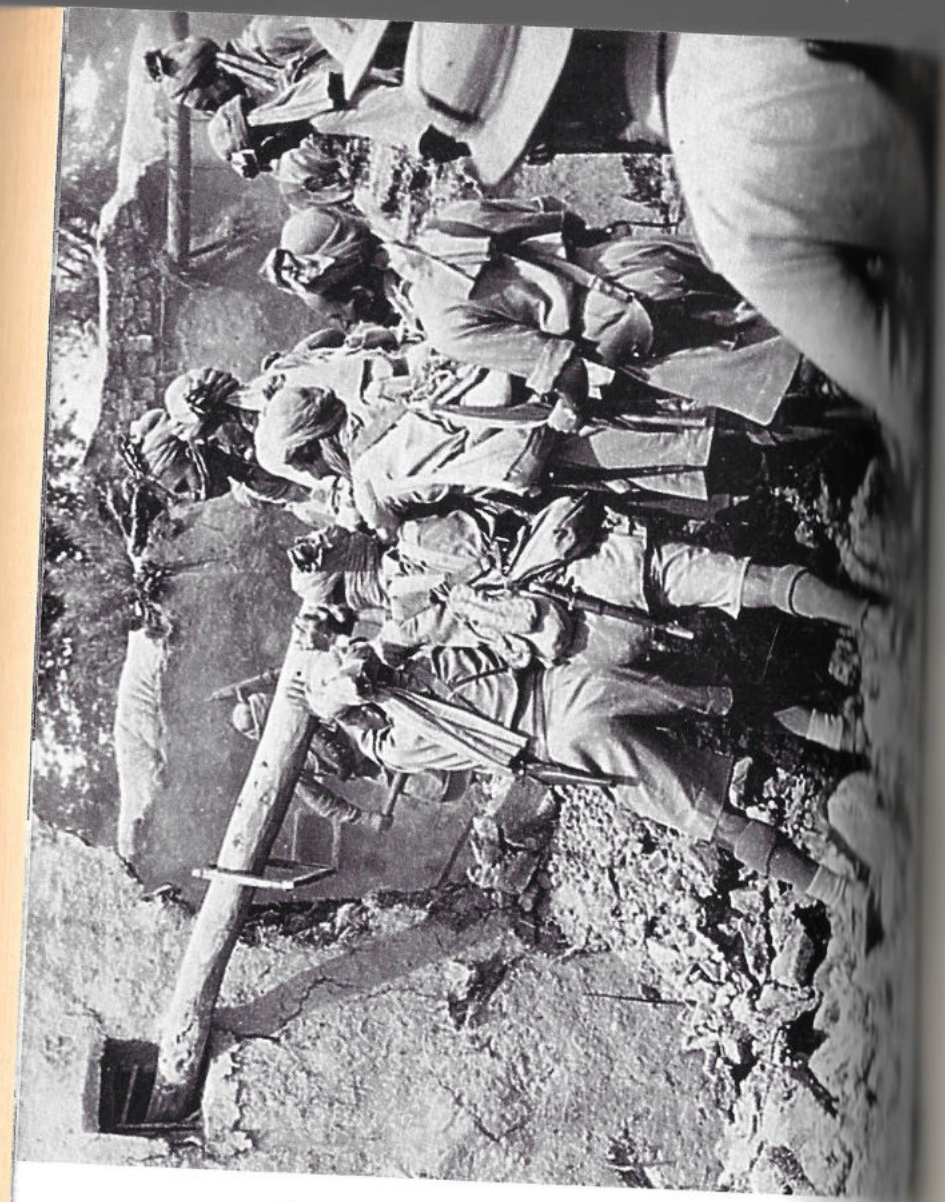


10. (*above*), The Officers' Mess at Jandola

11. (*left*), Subadar Amir Shah, Orakz dancing for joy at h news of his promotion

12. (*above right*), Datta Khel Fort

13. (*right*), South Waziristan Scouts using 'Walkie-talkie sets



14. Tochi Scouts, with two Sapper officers in attendance demolishing the headquarters of the Faqir of Ipi near Arsal Kot

ent. It was equally obvious that enemy artillery could make any rison very uncomfortable. Mahsuds and Wazirs saw the point and owed great ingenuity in acquiring from Afghanistan or manufactur- simple artillery pieces firing solid shot and, later, high explosive lls. One of the earliest of these pieces was Sadde Khan's gun.

adde Khan was a Shabi Khel Mahsud, a semi-professional hostile, bitious to extend his influence. Early in 1930 he commissioned the niguram armourers to construct a gun which would demolish any outs post and drive the Faranghi out of Waziristan. It was a reech-loader of 2¾ ins bore, firing a 9-lbs solid iron shot about nine hes long with a copper driving-band to take the barrel's rifling. It was ed by a ·303 blank cartridge which ignited a black-powder charge. arrel, carriage and wheels were detachable and could be loaded on to mels.

Attracted by this gun and stimulated by Congress propaganda that he Scouts were ripe for mutiny and the Army wholly committed to a ar against freedom fighters in India, there assembled a sizeable shkar under three well-known Mahsud hostiles, Gulin, Khaisor and amzan; and, of course, Sadde Khan himself. It included the Jalal hel Khassadar company, but the Mahsud tribe was by no means ited in its support; the Khassadars of Ladha fired on the lashkar, the bdullai of Makin told it to move along; and when it announced its ntention of blowing up an important road bridge, the women of the habi Khel sat on the bridge until the lashkar went away. They would ot, they said, have their houses destroyed just to please Gulin. The shkar, however, advanced on Sararogha.

Sararogha squatted on a plateau amid its wire entanglements with mething of the solidity and menace of Krak des Chevaliers, the great rusader castle in Syria. Eastward it frowned down a 500-foot cliff on to the vegetable gardens and pumping station beside the Tank Zam and to the hills beyond. Upstream, to the north-west, there was a view up the Barari Tangi between steep khud-sides and precipices, beyond which were higher, wooded mountains. Downstream, a long rifle-shot from the fort, was a higher ridge on which a stone blockhouse deterred any ill-wisher from sniping at the football ground, parade ground or landing-strip. Further to the south a succession of ridges and ravines stretched down to Jandola, fifteen miles away and 1,800 feet lower. The country around was not a no-go area, but the Mahsuds were far from friendly, and gashts had to watch what they were about.

The garrison consisted of three British officers, Captains Felix-Williams, FitzMaurice and Horace Dracott; three company com-

manders, Subadars Ghulam Haidar, Swati, Khan Baz, Malik Din Khel Afridi, and Umar Din, Bangi Khel Khattak; nine platoons (374 rifles) of trained Scouts, and eighty-two recruits. The civil authority was represented by the Assistant Political Agent, Captain Abdur Rahman Khan, and the Tahsildar. About a mile to the west was the Langar Khel piquet, a stone-built tower, garrisoned by Havildar Gul Dar and twelve Malik Din Khel sepoys.

Already messages wrapped round stones had been thrown into the Scouts' latrines promising rewards, in this world and the next, if they handed over their Officers. On the evening of 6 July 1930 a Shabi Khel Malik warned Williams that the lashkar was near; if he lied, he said, the Sahib could take revenge on his sons who were in Sararogha. At eight-thirty that evening the telephone wires were cut, and later the Sararogha Khassadar post was attacked. Its commander, Gulgai, brother of the local Malik Shah Bahram, was wounded, but killed a Wazir lashkarwal and wounded the enemy commander, Ramsan. (Later he was obliged to pay compensation for the death of the Wazir; such were the vagaries of war in Waziristan.) The Khassadars were withdrawn and the post was burnt.

At daybreak on 7 July about six hundred hostiles were in position on all the high ground around the fort. Two patrols slipped out of the chief gate, searched the nearby nullahs but drew blank. They were not fired at, but were called upon to hand over their officers, in particular Khan Baz; if they did so, they would be allowed to depart in peace. A gathering was seen about 1,600 yards away being addressed by a Mullah in white, and scattered by a burst of machine-gun fire.

Williams and the Assistant Political Agent were faced with the difficult problem of what to do about the Mahsud loyalists in and around Sararogha. They were a mixed bunch, including a reformed outlaw nicknamed Parang (Leopard), Khassadar Subadar Gul Rakhman, Malik Shah Bahram, and an extinct military volcano of immense distinction, Honorary Captain and retired Subadar Major Mir Badshah Khan, MVO, IOM, one-time Aide-de-Camp to His Royal Highness the Duke of Connaught. Prudence and a knowledge of frontier history argued that every Mahsud should be cleared out from every building close to the fort, and from Malik Shah Bahram's village on the cliff-top opposite. But this would mortally offend influential loyalists and might well turn them into furious rebels. A factor to be considered was that Shah Bahram's brother, Gulgai, was lying wounded in the civil hospital and his children had been brought in for safety. Moreover it would be of great political value if eminent Mahsuds

were seen to be fighting against the lashkar. The eventual decision was to trust them. Ten, including Gul Rakhman and Parang, would hold the thick-walled school, easily covered from the fort, and the remainder would hold Shah Bahram's village and the adjacent caves. The decision was amply justified. Not only did they hold their positions, but throughout the siege they supplied the Assistant Political Agent with accurate information about enemy movements and intentions.

The RAF bombed and strafed the enemy many times. The bombing was disconcerting to those unaccustomed to it, but the tribesmen learned to watch and shoot at the planes until the bombs were released, and then dive for cover.

The night of 7–8 July was spent by the enemy in taking out the Khassadar posts in the neighbourhood. As these were not supposed to stand up to serious attack, one after another was evacuated; most of the Khassadars withdrew in good order to Shah Bahram's village. Half-hearted attacks on Langar Khel piquet and on the village were beaten off without difficulty. More serious was an attempt on the pump-house, in the vegetable gardens four hundred yards from the fort. In a long siege in hot weather its loss could have been serious. Controlled fire was aimed at it when hammering on the door was heard, and the enemy retired without doing much damage.

The tribesmen still based their hopes on the 'Militia' defecting, and during the night they again called upon them to hand over their officers. 'We can't hear you,' replied Khan Baz. 'Come a little closer so that we can talk properly.' Imprudently they approached close enough for a well-aimed volley from the walls, and retired cursing Afridi perfidy.

Next morning, 8 July, a party of twelve was seen coming up the road. Luckily they were recognised as Khassadars, and sent to join the garrison at Shah Bahram's village. Another large gathering was seen being harangued by a man in a blue shirt. The Assistant Political Agent sent out Gul Rakhman, Parang and three others to find out who they were and what they were up to. Back came word that they were lashkarwals, so at the next opportunity they were machine-gunned. Blue-shirt and another were seen to fall, and Williams earned good marks from the Mahsuds by allowing them to be carried away. In the middle of the scorching afternoon, the Assistant Political Agent's orderly bravely carried Very lights and snuff to the isolated garrison of Langar Khel piquet who had signalled their need of them. Throughout the day all those not on guard carried out normal training in the morning and played basketball in the afternoon. Morale was very high.

At stand-to in the evening a Congress flag was planted about eight

hundred yards from the fort and numerous tribal standards were on the hillsides, such as had not appeared for fifteen years. They were perhaps, an indication that the Mahsuds regarded the siege as more of a propaganda exercise than as a serious operation of war, and were relying mainly on the 'Militia' changing sides. The enemy was estimated at anything up to 20,000; Williams thought there were about 5,000, of whom not more than half would be armed with modern rifles, and the rest hoping to acquire them.

Captain Abdur Rahim, the Assistant Political Agent, heard during the day that Sadde Khan's gun had now arrived. He also received a sketch-map of the fort, showing the sectors which would be stormed by various Mahsud sections and the Wazirs – the signal for the assault being the first shot from the great gun. At last light several camels were seen approaching and it was surmised that they carried the gun. At ten o'clock that evening Parang and a Malik who had been sent out to reconnoitre reported that the gun had actually been mounted where the Congress flag had been, and that a large crowd had collected to see the fun. They were dispersed by Very lights and controlled rifle- and machine-gun fire. There was a lot of shouting from outside the wire and one loud-mouthed fellow kept calling, 'You've put up a good fight. Now come out!' Subadar Umar Din directed a section's fire at the loud voice of which no more was heard. 'You have your answer,' he shouted.

At eleven o'clock there was a reverberating boom and a hurrooch overhead: Sadde Khan's gun was in action. Sniping redoubled, and the garrison awaited the assault. A second shot, better aimed, smashed into the wireless room. A third, and a fourth, followed. Disclosed by its flash, the gun was engaged by machine-guns and did not fire again that night. The assault, for which the garrison had been eagerly waiting, did not take place.

Next morning, 9 July, the patrol moving out of the chiga gate was heavily sniped and had to return until the first planes appeared overhead and engrossed the tribesmen's attention. The patrol went out again, and succeeded in locating the gun in a new position, a sangared cave 1,600 yards north of the fort. The area was bombed and machine-gunned, but Sadde Khan's gun had fired its last shot; some failure in the breech-block mechanism, or an overcharge of powder, had prevented it from locking, and the block had been blown back through the master gunner's stomach.

That was really the end of the siege. The destruction of the great gun and the realisation that the 'Militia' had no intention of defecting took the heart out of the lashkar, which had shown less than the usual

[illegible] determination. During the night of 9–10 July it disappeared. It was Sadde Khan's gun, it was hauled into Jandola and set up on the [illegible] outside the Officers' Mess.

It had not been much of a siege. The greatest loss was of fruit and vegetables consumed by the enemy somewhat unripe, and of fruit-trees damaged. But the point was made that the South Waziristan Scouts of 1930 were a very different corps from the Militia of 1919. Their victory was celebrated in a lavish feast provided by the Resident, Waziristan. About the same time the Tochi Scouts post at Datta Khel was also attacked. Years later Subadar Aman Gul, who had been a young Naik there, told Terence Philips about it.

Subadar Sayed, Afridi, was in command, and Faujoon, Yusufzai, was second-in-command. Sayed was in the garden talking to the gardener when a Madda Khel informer came running in and said, 'Close the gates and stand-to. A lashkar is upon you.' Sayed hurried back to the fort and the gates were closed with a bang. At the same time some five hundred armed men were seen running towards the fort from the rifle-range. There was no time to close the gaps in the wire, and the last man of the garrison had only just time to get in through the chiga gate when the lashkar surged in a wave up to the walls. It all happened so quickly that the guards hardly had time to take post and the chiga-platoon was still falling in. There was a babble of yells, 'Let us in! We're all Pathans and Mussulmans. Give up the fort!' They began beating with poles on the gate and all heaving against it so that it started to bulge inwards. Subadar Sayed was warning them that he would open fire when a plane appeared overhead. Either someone inside the fort found the strain too much and fired or else one of the lashkar fired at the plane. Instantly a hail of rifle-fire swept the packed mass outside the gate, and those who could run made off through the wire. The space between the wire and the wall was a shambles. The Wazirs left thirty dead, and carried off nobody knows how many wounded.

II

A Sort of War, 1935–7

The Redshirt movement throve in the settled areas on the frustration [illegible] being denied the limited self-government which other provinces [illegible] India enjoyed. In 1935 this was granted, and in 1937 the North W[illegible] Frontier Province attained full provincial self-government, includ[illegible] responsibility for law and order, the Chief Minister being Dr K[illegible] Sahib, brother of the Redshirt leader. He had no responsibility for t[illegible] trans-Frontier tribes, and did not interfere with their administrat[illegible] but the spectacle of a Pathan as Chief Minister, giving orders to Brit[illegible] District Commissioners, was an unsettling one.

In 1935 there was trouble among the Bajaur and Mohmand tri[illegible] north of Peshawar, necessitating two operations against them whi[illegible] eventually sucked in four brigade groups. It was noted for a sha[illegible] defeat inflicted by the Mohmands at Wucha Jawar on one of the l[illegible] Frontier battalions, the Guides (5/12 Frontier Force Regt) who in [illegible] hours lost three-quarters of the company-and-a-half engaged. T[illegible] Pathan evidently still had a bite in him.

The Scouts were not involved in these campaigns, which were wa[illegible] outside their area, and the numerous Mohmands in the Scou[illegible] remained loyal throughout. The decision was made that they should g[illegible] on leave and furlough as and when it was due. Indeed the South Waziristan Scouts Subadar Major Manawar Khan, a Mohmand, on h[illegible] return from the Jubilee of King George V was sent on special leave t[illegible] learn the story of Wucha Jawar from the Mohmand point of view.

There were certain features common to all Frontier campaigns. Th[illegible] first was that in the end the Sarkar was bound to win; it was unthinkab[illegible]

[illegible] it should fail to defeat a few thousand tribesmen and compel them [illegible] pay for their misdeeds and to submit to their country being opened [illegible] by a road. Both sides knew this perfectly well. The tribesmen could [illegible] win, but they could make victory so expensive for the Sarkar that no [illegible]empt would be made to occupy permanently their homelands and [illegible]ern them. The Mahsuds, Wazirs, Afridis, Orakzais and Mohmands [illegible] just that; their achievement was to be left more or less alone for a [illegible]dred years.

It was important that the butcher's bill should not be too high. [illegible]ish public opinion might accept a thirty per cent casualty rate when [illegible] stake was national survival, but not when the stake was pushing a [illegible] through the Khaisora valley. To minimise casualties, tactics were [illegible]pted of which the common feature was that they were very time-[illegible]suming. One was 'crowning the heights' or piqueting, already [illegible]scribed; another was the perimeter camp into which every brigade [illegible]umn crammed itself at night.

Early in the afternoon the day's march came to an end. Protected by [illegible]quets all round, colour parties marked out their unit lines, packed [illegible]ether as close as possible, and a staff officer marked out the [illegible]rimeter. Each unit moved into its allotted space and set to work, with [illegible] haste, digging its own sector of the perimeter ditch and building the [illegible]ny soil into a bullet-proof wall some four feet high. Then each man [illegible]g himself a hole or built himself a sangar in which to sleep; only the [illegible]mels, horses and mules were without some protection. Before night-[illegible]l all sentries were posted, some piquets called in, machine-guns set [illegible] fixed lines, and the brigade stood-to, each man in the place he would [illegible]cupy in the event of an attack. In fact an attack against machine-guns [illegible]d rifles firing at point-blank range was most unlikely. Instead there [illegible]uld be sniping, light or heavy, all through the night. It was a waste of [illegible]me to reply to this, except perhaps with the fixed-line machine-guns, [illegible]t the snipers might sometimes be stalked or ambushed. In general all [illegible]e column could do was put up with it, lying in their shallow pits while [illegible]llets cracked overhead, whined away after a ricochet, or occasionally [illegible]uddled into an unfortunate camel.

Against an enemy equipped with artillery and mortars, a perimeter [illegible]mp would be a death-trap, but on the Frontier it made sense. [illegible]ndeniably, however, it slowed down operations, taking hours off the [illegible]y's march. Scouts on their own never built perimeter camps, except [illegible]hen they were established for long in one place. If ever they spent the [illegible]ght in an Army column's camp, it was not expected (least of all by [illegible]themselves) that they build their sector of the wall, for they were always

last in at night and first out in the morning; and had, moreover, no pick or shovels.

After any skirmish, it was absolutely necessary to recover the wounded, if possible the dead and certainly their rifles. A prisoner who fell into the tribesmen's hands was lucky to be simply decapitated. It was more likely to be disembowelled and castrated, his privy member thrust into his mouth; to be flayed alive; or to be pegged out, his rectum open into which the women of the tribe urinated until he drowned. If a man fell wounded during the withdrawal from a piquet, the platoon company – even a whole battalion might have to put in a counter-attack to rescue him. Scouts, although Pathans, were more at risk in this respect than Indian or British soldiers, for a gasht, with neither machine-guns nor artillery, might be quite unable to counter-attack a strong lashkar.

Captain Tony Gibb survived a Mahsud knife-rush. He was with his Army battalion, commanding his company which was moving up a narrow ridge thickly covered with ilex trees. There was a sudden volley and he was knocked spinning by the sledge-hammer blows of two soft-nosed bullets. Lying shocked, helpless and terrified, he saw twenty or thirty tribesmen, brandishing long knives, burst through his leading platoon and tear down towards his company headquarters. He just had strength enough to roll down a precipitous slope, landing in a snow drift where the counter-attack found him unconscious an hour later. When he came to, he found that a third bullet had hit his wrist, cutting his watch-strap. He later joined the South Waziristan Scouts hoping, he said, to find the bastard wearing his watch. But though he then made light of his experience, he had nightmares about it for months.

There were occasions, very few, when Mahsuds and Wazirs did not act true to form. In 1920 the group of Mahsud hamlets and fortified keeps known as Makin was being burnt as a punishment. A gasht of the North Waziristan Militia, under Lieutenant Barlow, was piqueting a hill overlooking the scene. Smoke from the burning obscured the hilltop and a machine-gun opened up on it, hitting Barlow with several bullets and knocking him down the enemy side of the hill. He came to rest on a ledge beside a badly wounded Mahsud. Their common misfortunes struck some chord between them. Barlow handed his water-bottle to the Mahsud, who took a swig from it and said, 'Our people will be here soon, Sahib, and will kill you if they find you. Roll down under the rock and hide.' Barlow just managed to do so before he passed out; and was eventually rescued.

Despite the unpleasant habits of the tribesmen, and occasional

forbidden reprisals, there was little ill-feeling between the two sides. The tribesmen knew that, if they fought well, they would not be blamed even though they were sure to be defeated. Soldiers were quite pleased if the enemy put up a good show. The enemy in no way threatened the British rule of India; it was far better to have a frontier battle than a riot in Calcutta.

The soldier's view of the Frontier was strictly professional. No doubt the higher command worried about the implication of tying up at a time of international tension two divisions of regular troops in chasing these gallywags, but to the ordinary regimental soldier the Frontier provided the excitement of not too arduous or too prolonged active service with first class training for all ranks. And Scouts within days of a fight could be cheerfully discussing it with the ex-enemy.

As for the Politicals, simple soldiers professed themselves quite at a loss to know which side they were on. There are many versions of the tale of a Political Agent attached to a column who interrupted a conversation about Mahsud casualties, 'You're all wrong. We haven't killed nearly as many as you think.'

Politicals always seemed to be advising military thrusters not to do this or that because of the bad effect it would have on the Abdullai, or the Tori Khel, or some other gang of unmitigated blackguards whom the Brigadier had never heard of and had no intention of inviting to tea. In normal circumstances their view would prevail. Only in something like full-scale war did the army assume control, with the GOC taking over the role of Resident. Then the Political Agent could only look wise, advise and deplore.

In 1935 the Mohmands sued for peace and the four brigades withdrew. But many people felt that Waziristan would be next to blow up. A generation had grown up who had been nurtured on their fathers' tales of 1919 but were as yet unblooded themselves. And blow up it did.

The trouble started early in 1936 not with some dramatic act of colonial oppression or freedom fighters' defiance, but with what should have been no more than a police court case.

A Moslem student in Bannu abducted a Hindu girl, more or less willing, who became a convert to Islam, more or less willing, and her abductor's bride, more or less willing, taking the name of 'Islam Bibi'. But she was a minor, so her parents took the matter to Court – not to the Jirga, since they were Hindus and the abduction had taken place in British India, but to a British Indian Court.

The case immediately took on a communal aspect, with angry

Moslem mobs demonstrating in Bannu and even threatening the Deputy Commissioner's house. He was an officer of the Indian Political Service, Lieutenant-Colonel Evelyn Cobb, so famous for his loquacity that the expression 'Cobbologue' had passed into Political and Scouts parlance. His first reaction when confronted with a hostile mob was to climb on to a chair and talk to it. And talk. And talk. Gradually by ones and twos, then a dozen at a time, the mob melted away, until Cobb was addressing only his orderly and a few policemen.

But the case of the abducted girl could not be so easily dismissed. Agitation spread to the Daur tribe, not as martial as Wazirs but very fanatical. They were roused by a holy man named Haji Mirza Ali Khan, better known as the Faqir of Ipi. He had not hitherto been active in politics, but had a reputation for piety and good works. He now flared up as a firebrand, preaching that Islam was endangered, every Moslem must rally to the Holy War. He raised a Daur lashkar which the Tochi Scouts dispersed without bloodshed. He then established himself in the Khaisora valley among his own tribe, the far more formidable Tori Khel section of the Utmanzai Wazirs.

Frontier experts used to point to the Tori Khel as an example of the success of peaceful economic penetration. There was no tribe less likely to cause trouble. They owned good irrigated land in the Tochi and Khaisora valleys and around Bannu itself. They owned huge flocks of sheep. They drew large sums in Maliki and Khassadari, in road- and timber- and firewood- and meat- and milk-contracts, and in rent for the land on which Razmak cantonment was built. They were almost hamsayas of the Government. They seemed perfectly content – but the truth was they bitterly resented, while profiting from, the Government's presence in their country; their rapacity was insatiable and unsatisfied; and they spent much of their wealth in the purchase of ·303 rifles.

In the mid 1930s they, like all Pathans, had been aware that changes were taking place which would not be to their advantage. Politically they were neither naive nor ill-informed. They might discount Congress propaganda while pocketing Congress money – but they saw the Government of India Act of 1935 as a concession to Hindu pressure, and a Hindu majority in the Legislative Assembly as the first step towards Hindu rule over the Frontier itself. Odious as was the erosion of their independence by the British, it would be far worse if the British handed them over to the Hindus.

For an annual sum of 7,500 rupees the Tori Khel had agreed to the construction of a road southwards from Mir Ali into the Khaisora valley. But the usual dissatisfaction over the distribution of this money

and of road-construction contracts developed into hostility to the road itself. By the autumn of 1936, although the first instalments of the 'Khaisora Allowance' had been paid, work on the road had not started. The Tori Khel also felt that the Government had been unfair to them in its adjudication of a boundary dispute with the Mahsuds. They were therefore in a receptive mood to the Faqir's preaching and saw in the case of 'Islam Bibi' a test of the intentions towards Moslems of a Hindu-biased Government.

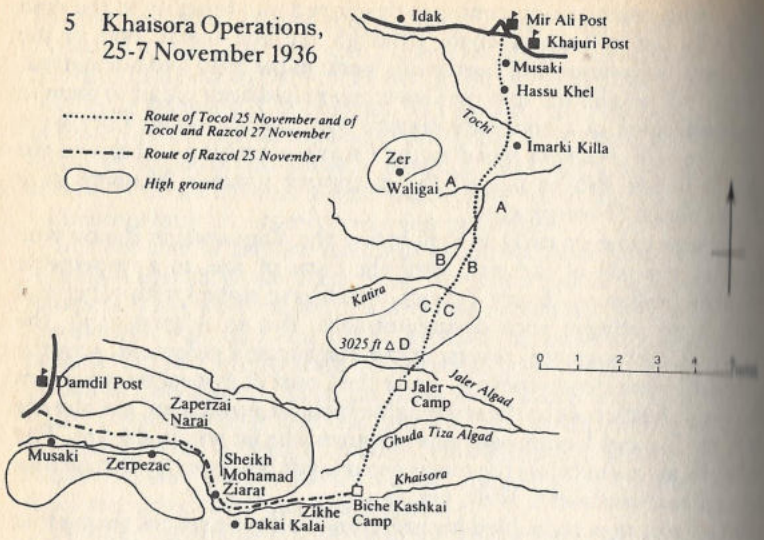
The case came up early in 1936 before the Magistrate in Bannu who awarded custody of the girl, until she came of age, to a respectable Moslem gentleman. Every Political must have sighed with relief and most Army officers with disappointment. But in August 1936, the Judicial Commissioner, reversing the Magistrate's judgment, sent the girl back to her Hindu parents. Later the Court of Appeal was to return her like a shuttlecock to the respectable Moslem gentleman, but already with the Judicial Commissioner's judgment the fat was in the fire. The Rule of Law is doubtless the most precious gift bestowed by Britain on a grateful sub-continent. Well, yes, but . . .

The Faqir now redoubled his preaching, with the special theme that never must the infidel Sarkar drive its impious road through the Khaisora. He promised the faithful immunity from bullets, shells and bombs, with the rider that anyone who was hit was obviously lacking in faith and therefore deserved it. The Government called on the Tori Khel Jirga to honour its undertaking on the road; the Maliks agreed, but the young men, spoiling for a fight, refused.

The Tori Khel must be shown who was master. A plan was drawn up that on 25 November the Razmak brigade (Razcol) would start from Damdil and move eastward down the Khaisora valley. The Bannu brigade (Tocol) would start from Mir Ali and move southward over low hills. They would meet and spend the night at Biche Kashkai in the Khaisora valley, and return next day to their bases. Razcol moving over the more difficult country, along the boulder-strewn bed of the Khaisora river overlooked by high ridges on each flank, would do about thirteen miles each day; Tocol over easier country about sixteen miles. It was too far if opposition was encountered, but opposition was not expected; it would be an exemplary demonstration of the Government's might, enlivened perhaps by a little long-range sniping. (See Map 5.)

In both columns the Tochi Scouts had vital tasks. With Razcol, eight platoons would provide distant flank protection, out beyond the close piqueting of the regular troops, and six platoons would operate in front

5 Khaisora Operations, 25-7 November 1936



of the advance guard, flushing out opposition before it could delay the column's advance. With Tocol, four infantry platoons would act as right flank guard and two Mounted Infantry troops* as left flank guard, also outside and beyond the close piqueting.

Hopes of a peaceful promenade were soon proved illusory. On reaching Zaperzai, about one-third of the way to Biche Kashkai, Felix-Williams (formerly South Waziristan Scouts and now commanding the Tochi Scouts) with the platoons leading Razcol was warned by Khassadars that there were hostiles on the hills ahead. They soon came under fire and, as yet unsupported by the column's advance guard, took the first of the high features. Subsequently, with the help of a company of the Guides, they took, one by one, the ridges on both sides of the Khaisora and held them while the column passed through. They came down the road in darkness, half-an-hour after the rear party had passed through, and followed the column to camp after having been moving and fighting for thirteen and a half hours during the Ramadan fast. It was one of the rules of Frontier war that empty cartridge cases must not be left to be collected and refilled by the tribesmen. It required nerve

* Under Tim Taylor, the only Frontier Corps officer to become a Major General in the Australian Army.

matically to collect empty cases while under fire. These six platoons fired 1,800 rounds and brought back 1,760 cases.

The flank piqueting was described by John Prendergast, a Wing Officer, on a hilltop far to the left flank of the column:

> I could hear the deep note of the medium machine-guns and the sharper one of the light automatics, with the occasional crump of our little howitzers. Clearly there was quite a party going on. As the day wore on, the noise grew fainter. It became hotter and hotter, until you could have fried an egg on the rocks and I was beginning to feel the terrible pangs of thirst. I eked out my water prudently, though it was by then as hot as tea and came straight out as sweat . . .
>
> In the late afternoon we were to withdraw to our fort at Dosalli. The opposite force had to cross over the valley towards us to get to the road and we had to cover it with brisk fire as it was closely followed. Then we trudged up the steep road to Dosalli. It had been a blazing hot day during the month of Ramadan when the Scouts were forbidden to drink in the daylight hours. They were exhausted and scarcely able to carry our casualties, who must have suffered horribly too. Stretcher-bearers had to be changed every hundred yards, officers taking their turn.

Tocol had a rougher time, mainly because the brigade staff did not have proper control, and one of its battalions, the 3/7th Rajputs, was a new arrival. Felix-Williams, anticipating difficulties in communicating with brigade, attached a Scouts signals terminal to the main column. With it also went the Scouts Medical Officer, George Graham, and a Mess servant with a camel laden with appropriate provender. The Scouts Mounted Infantry were to act as distant left flank guard, and four infantry platoons under Victor Wainright as right flank guard, initially piqueting Zer mountain – quite unnecessarily, in his opinion, since it was at least two miles from the axis of advance. He viewed with apprehension

> a slightly complicated operation with a scratch column. Zer is a pig of a feature, full of great outcrops of rock which make observation difficult. Moreover my gasht was to be a mixture of Right and Left Wings under Subadar Shawal Dad, a tall, scraggy Barak with a great beak of a nose and both eyes peering out of the same hole. Miry and Kabul reckoned that his mouth was the most efficient part of his head.

However, one of the platoon commanders was Lal Din, Mohmand, a modest, self-effacing little man known as 'Tank' because of his habit of

going bald-headed at any operation and his apparent invulnerability to bullets. Although the Tori Khel Maliks warned that there would be trouble, and Roy Beatty, acting Assistant Political Agent, told the Brigadier that tribesmen were building sangars, Brigade did not really expect opposition. Wainright's

orderly, Baz Gul, put a couple of tins of Gold Flake into my haversack. When I called him an idiot because I hadn't smoked for months, he said I'd be glad of them by the evening.

We set off very early to secure Zer before the column approached it. The leading platoon as they cleared the crest saw about three tribesmen making off in a hurry. They were almost certainly hostile; friendly shepherds would have stayed to chat and delay us. But we were still observing the rule of not firing until fired upon, so we had to let them go. I reported to brigade, but throughout the day getting anything out of them was very difficult. In comparison with Razcol, with whom we usually worked, Tocol seemed a very straggly affair.

Shooting started at about A—A [See Map 5], and built up with a lot of automatic and machine-gun fire, and by B—B the column's progress was slowed right down. We were not fired on, and we saw no tribesmen moving in from our side. We skirted to the right of a Rajput company which did not look too happy, officers and NCOs walking about a lot between sections instead of staying under cover and moving fast. As we came down from Zer, the leading platoon killed two tribesmen who shot at them, one a huge fellow; they looked like Mahsuds. Twice I asked brigade for orders, but the only answer I got was 'get on' – nothing sensible like 'Take over as vanguard,' or 'Continue as flank guard but a little closer in.'

I noticed three or four sangars, C—C, on the far side of a nullah and roughly at right angles to the column's axis of advance. Fire from these was holding up the Rajputs who were very brave but had not a clue and got shot down in clumps, losing all the British Officers of their two forward companies. As we approached the nullah I dropped Shawal Dad with two platoons on the near bank to give covering fire and with the other two, Akoras and Lal Din's Mohmands, fixed swords and went for the sangars, killing six or seven. I cannot honestly say I saw any bayonetted, they were probably shot as they tried to get away. We caught one Mahsud, took his rifle and dagger and put a rope on him. We had one killed and two wounded and several near misses, bullet holes through our loose shirts and partog.

Soon after this the column halted and the Brigadier held what would now be called an 'O Group'. It was well past the time for settling into a perimeter for the night, and I made myself unpopular by saying so with rather more vehemence than my age and rank warranted. The Brigadier, however, chose to ignore my advice and press on to Biche Kashkai in the dark.

The Mounted Infantry were sent back to Khajuri (George Graham saw two sowars leading horses with their dead friends' bodies tied over the saddle, arms and legs dangling) and the column moved on at nine-thirty, with Wainright's gasht as Advanced Guard, accompanied by Roy Beatty. (What business the Assistant Political Agent had up in front is not quite clear, but as an officer of Hodson's Horse and the Tochi Scouts as well, he thought it was the right place.)

We moved in a rather tight diamond formation, Lal Din's Mohmands leading, slowly in the dark. The popular Khassadar, 'George', came through from behind, and told us that Razcol had reached Biche Kashkai but with many casualties. I believe he was carrying a message for Razcol. Personally I always thought him a very suspect character, sucking up to the Razmak garrison and far too matey with Wazirs for a so-called Mahsud.

Between nine-thirty and ten there was a sudden burst of fire, about thirty shots, from a bit to the right of our axis of advance close to the far bank of the Ghuda Tiza Algad just as we were about to cross it. The muzzle-flashes were most unpleasant. Baz Gul and I hit the deck, and the Mahsud prisoner broke away and dashed off to the left. I was carrying an automatic pistol and was so slow in getting off the safety-catch that I missed him. I shouted to Shawal Dad to get the right hand platoon on to where the fire came from. No Shawal Dad. There was some rustling in the thick grass and, thinking it might be the prisoner, I went after it with my pistol, only to encounter Roy with his hand full of iron stalking me. By this time the main body had joined in the shooting from behind us, and I shouted in English, Urdu and Pushtu to cease fire and give me a chance to sort things out; being the meat in the sandwich wasn't my idea of fun. Shawal Dad turned up and told me he had been taking the right hand platoon forward. I didn't believe him.

Some time after ten o'clock it was decided to camp in the Ghuda Tiza area, and I was told to build and occupy two platoon-strength piquets. I built one with the left hand platoon and told Shawal Dad to

build the other with the rear platoon. It was slow work in the dark. Lal Din had the forward platoon well sited for all-round defence, and I told him to wait half an hour and then withdraw with the right hand platoon to the camp. Some time after midnight I was satisfied with the piquets and went back to the camp myself, reporting to the Brigade Major who was comfortably tucked into pyjamas and sleeping-bag, which I rectified. I then found the Mess servant who gave me a large slice of plum-cake and a treble whisky-and-soda. He said the firing had stampeded a lot of animals into the night, including the Brigadier's own horse.

Light is thrown on the staff-work and signals of this operation by the fact that when the commander of Razcol wished to inform the commander of Tocol that he had reached Biche Kashkai, he was obliged to send word by a Tori Khel Malik. And when the commander of Tocol wished to inform the commander of Razcol that he was still well short of Biche Kashkai, he was obliged to send word by the Khassadar, 'George', who was stopped by the enemy but talked his way through, 'Come on, let a chap earn an honest penny.'

Next day Tocol, with loads to collect that had been lost in the night's stampede, could not move until mid-morning and reached Biche Kashkai in the afternoon. As the troops were rationed for only three days, plans were changed and it was decided that both columns would march to Mir Ali on 27 November.

For that move ten platoons of Scouts under Felix-Williams acted as Advance Guard Mounted Troops, covering a front of 2,500 yards well ahead of the Advanced Guard. He told Wainright, 'Stay with the rearguard until you have extricated the camp piquets and then keep running until you reach me in front.'

Wainright recalls:

> So we tightened our straps and jogged for about four miles until I met Felix talking to Major Fisk of 7th Bengal Mountain Battery. Fisk handed me an enormous flask and, when I spluttered, said, 'Good God, boy, you didn't think I'd dilute it for a job like this?' Felix sent me back with three platoons to do laybacks for the left flank guard. I saw one interesting incident. The first wave of a piquet of Northamptons came off nice and steadily. When the second wave came off there was a lot of shooting and one man rolled over and lay still. Two stretcher-bearers went back for him like rockets, but when they got to him, booted him to his feet and down the hill. He wasn't hit, only

> frightened. A little later I was almost knocked over by a terrific kick in the seat of my partog by George Laman. 'Stop walking about like a spare f—g lamp-post,' he said. 'It's cost the taxpayer thousands to train you!'

On the right flank Wainright's friend 'Miry', the fierce little Jowaki Afridi Subadar Mir Hamza, won a remarkably good IOM by cornering in a fortified tower and capturing an entire gang of hostiles. 'At Miranshah,' said Wainright, 'after it was all over an ammunition check produced more empty cases than rounds fired. Claude Erskine asked me what I had felt like in the Ghuda Tiza Algad, and I replied, "Rather frightened and very angry." He reckoned that was about normal.'

In three days ten Scouts platoons and two troops of Mounted Infantry had twenty-six casualties, and won an MC, an IOM and two IDSMs. The two brigades of regular troops had one hundred and seven casualties. It could not really be claimed that the Tori Khel had been taught a lesson, but everyone agreed that the Scouts' performance had been brilliant.

The enemy were mainly Tori Khel, with a few Madda Khel Wazirs and a stiffening of irreconcilable Mahsuds. The Faqir's propaganda was obviously successful, and there was every chance of a major Frontier war. Therefore the General Officer Commanding Northern Command assumed control of all military operations, and also political control of Waziristan, with the Resident, Waziristan, as his Chief Political Officer. Reinforcements were brought in, the Rawalpindi Brigade, two light tank companies, and two extra batteries of mountain artillery. The Tori Khel must be punished.

Jimmy Gimson was a Captain of the Guides Cavalry, now a Wing Commander of the Tochi Scouts, all steel wire and ginger with piercing blue eyes, a bristling moustache and a dangerous temper combined with charm and consideration for others. He returned from home leave and marriage just too late for the November fighting, and wrote to his wife on 13 December that the war was 'diminuendo'. Work on the road into the Khaisora valley, from Khajuri to Biche Kashkai, was progressing under Scouts protection. On 16 December he celebrated Id-ul-Fitr, the end of the fast, in an immense feast with the Pathan officers.

To punish the Tori Khel the troops were burning some villages and Gimson, watching from the hilltops, was 'very sick to see small villages where I had been hospitably entertained going up in flames. Unfortunately the Army do not have to gasht in this country as we have. It will

be a long time before we are welcome here again.' Then came Christmas sports and a chikor shoot near Dosalli post.

Victor Wainright spent a lonely but restful Christmas in Birlis Kashkai camp, three weeks

> with the culverts down, telephone wires cut and the wireless on the blink. A rest-cure except for the occasional *daz-maz* [sniping]. A plane from Miranshah used to fly over every morning and drop the mail, a newspaper, and a loaf of bread on the sort of parachute small boys make with a handkerchief, string and a stone. My Christmas dinner consisted of a light snack of *pâté de foie gras*, turtle soup, whitebait, turkey and ham, and Christmas pud dropped in a parcel of tins sent by a girl friend from Fortnums.

By the end of the year the Tori Khel, disgusted at the paucity of support given by their fellow Moslems, had had enough. They were summoned for a full Jirga to discuss peace terms, including the fine they must pay, and sent back home to think about it. The rifles and hostages demanded as surety for good behaviour were handed in, and on 11 January 1937 the Jirga accepted the Government's peace terms, which included a still fine and the requirement that they control or expel the Faqir of Ipi.

There was still, however, a constant influx of hostiles from the Afghan province of Khost, Tannis and Zadrans and Mangals, who knew like the backs of their hands the paths across the Durand Line. They had to be stopped, lest they stir up more trouble. It was rather similar to the SWS chapaos for gangs raiding into Derajat, except that the Khostwals had to be intercepted on their way in, not like the raiders on their way out, heavy with booty. The cold on these January nights was arctic, as men had to keep still for hours. Gimson wore vest, shirt, four sweaters, greatcoat, pants, two pairs of trousers, two pairs of stockings and socks.

But he had his reward. After three failures, he set a chapao two miles west of Dosalli. 'At 1030 the lashkarwals lit fires a quarter of a mile to the east. I started off with the reserve platoon to stalk them, but meanwhile they ran into the ambush of the other two platoons. There was a ten-minute battle, and three Madda Khel were captured.' The next night he tried with five platoons four and a half miles east of Dosalli. The gang walked straight into them and they held their fire until the last possible minute. 'Two enemy dead and a third picked up dead the next day.'

'War now really over,' wrote Gimson to his wife on 20 January. He

took fifty recruits out to scour the plain for bustard and played in a polo match, Scouts against Brigade HQ. There was a NCOs Promotion Course, and practice began for the annual Scouts sports. His Wing were to build and occupy a new fort at Khaisora, with fifty Sappers and Miners to help with the skilled jobs. 'The Tori Khel have brought their families back,' he wrote on 31 January, 'so there will probably be no more trouble.' He actually had a meal with a Tori Khel Malik. The Faqir of Ipi, persuaded by the Tori Khel Maliks that he was *persona non grata*, departed for pastures new. Political control of Waziristan was handed back to the Resident. Things were getting back to normal.

Six days later, on 6 February, Captain Keogh of the South Waziristan Scouts and his orderly were shot dead on the road near Ladha, and on the following day occurred the murder of Captain Roy Beatty, by a Madda Khel gang near Boya, to which reference has already been made.

The Faqir was in business again. He had promises of support from several tribes on both sides of the Durand Line. Early in March he issued a decree calling upon all Khassadars to desert, on pain of being denied Moslem funeral rites. 'Khassadar Subadar and twelve Khassadars deserted,' wrote Gimson on 3 March, 'a bad sign.'

On 29 March the newly-arrived (Abbottabad) brigade had heavy casualties, two British officers, two Gurkha officers and thirty Gurkhas being killed, forty-four more wounded. Next day Gimson 'gashted over the scene of yesterday's fighting. We brought in the bodies of five Gurkhas, ammunition, stores and four enemy bodies.' The war was not, after all, over. The GOC resumed political control of Waziristan; the Tochi Scouts and SWS were placed under Army command, and all leave was stopped.

Meanwhile the Mahsuds, never on cordial terms with the Tori Khel, had withdrawn the skirts of their garments from these unseemly disturbances. A few hard men had gone north, but the tribe as a whole remained neutral. Their Khassadars actually shot up fellow-Mahsuds whom they found cutting telephone wires, and put up a good fight against a Powindah lashkar which was up to no good. This Powindah lashkar, half-Suliman Khel and half-Kharot, led by a Kharot whose father had been killed by the Zhob Militia, gave Wana brigade a run for its money on 17 February 1937, about twenty-two miles west of Wana at Obo Sar, near the Afghan border.

At first light the Advanced Guard had moved out of camp, followed by the main body, while four infantry platoons of SWS under Douglas Robertson and one troop Mounted Infantry under Ralph Venning

stayed to see the transport and followers safely on their way, and then act as rear-guard mounted troops. When hundreds of mules, camels and followers were jammed tight trying to get out of the perimeter and follow the main body to the north-east, the enemy suddenly opened heavy fire on them from the high ground along the Afghan border. The whole lot stampeded, bolting not north-eastward along the piqueted route, but to the south-east where they would have no protection. The Scouts infantry platoon manned the perimeter wall and fired on the enemy; Risadar Gulab of the Mounted Infantry said to Venning, 'You know what they'll do next, Sahib? They'll get on to that hill to the east and cut off the transport and followers.' Venning gave the order to mount and (feeling painfully conspicuous on the only grey horse) led the Mounted Infantry at a gallop for that hill, dismounted at the bottom and raced up to the top, arriving there just before the enemy. Lowis, the Assistant Political Agent, with the SWS infantry and Khassadars helped round up the animals and sort out the confusion, but four rifles and much ammunition were lost.

'Two battalions up from India were awful,' he wrote. 'Four platoons of SWS, with MI, were superb and did most of the rearguard and flank guards, losing two killed, a horse and a sowar wounded.' They were sniped all day, and Venning on his grey horse was glad to reach camp.

A grand Jirga of the Dré Mahsud was called at Sararogha on 8 March, under the walls of the fort, covered by machine-guns, to hear the Government's decision on a fine on the whole tribe for the murder of Captain Keogh in Mahsud tribal limits. The Political Agent was 'Barnie' Barnes, than whom there was no better man at handling a difficult Jirga. He understood well that it was no good issuing orders to a Jirga: they would just walk out on you; they had to be argued into agreement. Barnes was convincing in English: 'Well, in Pushtu he's better still,' wrote Lowis. 'He puts the most difficult things across in such a way that the Jirga can do nothing but agree. I'm inclined to get angry, which gets one nowhere.' Barnes, sitting at ease (one did not address a Jirga standing), started off by warning the tribe that they must control their troublemakers. This was ill-received. There was a lot of heckling, 'That's not our job, it's yours . . . That's what you're paid for. You're the Political Agent aren't you?' A fellow with a voice like a bull bawled out, 'You're the Political Agent. Haven't you got any balls?' It was a bitterly cold day. Barnes thrust his hands into his trouser pockets, groped about and shouted back, 'Well, I thought I had. But it's so bloody cold that now I'm not so sure.' It brought the house down, the Mahsuds rocking with laughter, and the atmosphere at once improved.

In the end they agreed to pay 75,000 rupees for Keogh's murder, to expel the Faqir should he enter Mahsud territory, and to control their troublemakers, assurances which they more or less honoured.

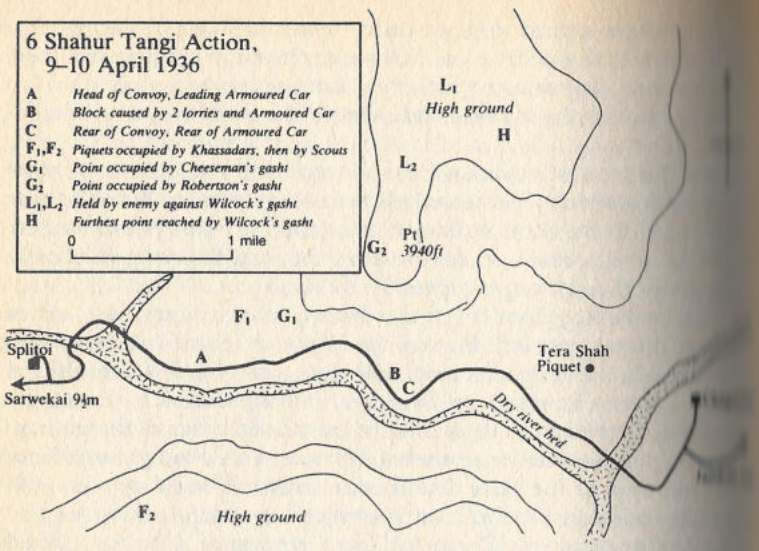
Could it be that the Mahsud had changed his spots? No, it could not.

Perhaps the greatest advantage the Government forces now enjoyed was motor transport. (But not only Government forces: a Wazir lashkar was brought to the front in hired buses.) Motor convoys escorted by armoured cars seemed so secure that the roads were not usually piqueted for their passage, except by Khassadars.

At daybreak on 9 April 1937, a routine convoy of forty-nine lorries and two private cars left Manzai for Wana. It carried military and civilian loads, leave details rejoining their units, and some officers returning from a language examination. It was escorted by four armoured cars, distributed at equal lengths from front to rear of the convoy. There was also an infantry escort of fifty-one with two light machine-guns, and most of the leave details were armed. The convoy- and the escort-commanders were both very experienced, and the convoy seemed well-found and secure. There had been reports of a hostile named Kunia Khel in the vicinity and of tribesmen 'apparently engaged in a tactical exercise' in the Shahur Tangi. Unfortunately no one put two and two together, except the Political Agent and the SWS Commandant, Major Skrine, who drove seventy miles to Waziristan District Headquarters to advise against running the convoy that day.

The Shahur Tangi, on the Manzai-Wana road, was a notorious place for ambushes in the days of animal transport. It is a defile three miles long formed by the Shahur nullah, generally dry or a mere trickle, running between steep rocky hills. The road runs, with three sharp bends, along the north side of the defile, above the nullah bed, and for about two miles the defile is very narrow with steep slopes above and below the road, which is not wide enough to turn a vehicle except with much forwarding and reversing. On either side of the nullah are innumerable boulders, caves and catchment-drains from which it is easy to enfilade, at point-blank range, stretches of road up which lorries must crawl in low gear. There were stone-built posts at Chagmalai and Splitoi, bottom and top of the Tangi, but these had been evacuated in the comfortable circumstances of the 1930s. An early morning flight by the RAF disclosed nothing suspicious; but the convoy commander, as he entered the defile from the Chagmalai end, noticed with surprise that there were no Khassadars there either. (See Map 6, p. 160.)

At a quarter to eight, when the leading armoured car was two-thirds



of the way through, the rear well inside the Tangi and the [illegible] crawling up the steepest part, intense fire was opened along its [illegible] length and continued for about fifteen minutes. Nearly all the [illegible] sitting beside the drivers or in the two private cars, were killed [illegible] wounded in the first minutes. Many of the escort were shot before [illegible] could jump down from the lorries, and many drivers killed or wounded who, from the Army of 1937, could not readily be replaced; [illegible] lorries, jammed together or slewed across the road, made a total block. The Mahsuds knew their job. Their positions were just above [illegible] maximum elevation of the armoured cars' machine-guns. The survivors were pinned down in the ditches beside the road or culverts under it, cowering from the tribesmen's soft-nosed bullets. Thus in the centre there was a sort of stalemate and a Medical Officer, Captain N. M. Durrani, himself a Pathan, heroically walked towards the tribesmen calling on them in Pushtu to cease fire while he brought the wounded under cover. He was shot dead.

Lieutenant Hopkinson in the leading armoured car managed to get out of the Tangi with the three leading lorries, one driver being wounded. He sent them on, and returned to give what help he could. The other three armoured cars, spaced at intervals down the column, were all immobilised by stranded lorries, but able to use their machine-

guns to cover the road, except at one point where it was defiladed and the tribesmen came in with knives, mutilating and finishing off the wounded officers and several others.

The nearest Scouts were on a road protection gasht from Sarwekai, one troop Mounted Infantry and four platoons under Captain Cheeseman. At 7.55 they heard firing and marched to the sound of the guns. But Lowis, the Assistant Political Agent, was at Splitoi before them, with a lorry-load of Maliks and Khassadars from Wana, where he had heard the news by wireless. He put the Khassadars into two permanent piquet-posts (F1 and F2, see Map 5) without opposition, climbed over the wall of the fort, opened the gate and found the telephone working, the line miraculously uncut. He was thus able to establish communication with Jandola. (Throughout, this was a soldiers' battle, everyone doing the best he could with very little central direction since the Scouts from west and east were separated by the full length of the Tangi, and detachments of Scouts, armoured cars and Khassadars arrived piecemeal at the scene of action.) Cheeseman and his Sarwekai gasht arrived about mid-day taking over Splitoi post and the piquets from the Khassadars.

On the same day the Jandola and Sararogha garrisons were changing over, and when the news arrived, only three platoons were in Jandola. Although they had just marched in from Sararogha, they piled into lorries with Major Skrine and Lieutenant Wilcock and drove at top speed to Chagmalai. They debussed and, following the first principle of mountain warfare, made straight for the high ground north of the Tangi, with orders from Skrine to try to link up with the Scouts from Sarwekai and to prevent tribesmen streaming down from the north to join in the battle. A plane arrived to support them but, with one bullet in the petrol tank and another in the pilot's ankle, it had to force-land on the road, crumpling a wing against the only tree for miles. Other planes, however, gave some support during the day and at least encouraged the survivors of the convoy.

Advancing towards the highest peak (L1), about two miles west of Chagmalai, Wilcock's three platoons came under very heavy fire from the front and right flanks and were in danger of being cut off by tribesmen hastening towards the Tangi. Regulars from Manzai arrived at Chagmalai, including an officer senior to Skrine who assumed command, and decided that Wilcock's platoon must be withdrawn. The withdrawal was closely followed up by overwhelming numbers of tribesmen, and Wilcock was shot in the shoulder.

The rear platoon was commanded by Havildar Multan, Sipah Afridi.

He was a very fine shot, a wonderful exponent of 'fifteen rounds rapid' his head and the rifle pressed into his shoulder as steady as a rock, his right hand working the bolt with the regularity of a metronome. During the withdrawal along a knife-edged ridge he was badly wounded and could go no further. Knowing that the wound was mortal, knowing the his fate should he fall alive into the tribesmen's hands, he *ordered* his platoon to leave him to cover their retreat. For some minutes they heard the well-known sound of Multan's rapid fire: then it stopped. In the late afternoon three more Scouts platoons arrived at Chagmalai and established a piquet three-quarters of a mile west of the post.

Meanwhile Cheeseman's Sarwekai gasht had seized the high point (G1) north of the Tangi, preventing tribesmen from coming down from the north. They commanded the west end of the Tangi and their covering fire helped a section of armoured cars from Sarwekai under Lieutenant Wetherell to unblock the head of the convoy. The leading lorry was slewed across the road, its civilian driver lying wounded beneath it. Under a hail of bullets Wetherell pulled out the driver, started the lorry and drove it clear. But there was still a block, for the driver of the next lorry was dead and the engine shot through. With great difficulty a tow-rope was attached and, steered by a volunteer, the lorry was towed away by an armoured car. But the third lorry was then hit in the petrol tank and burst into flames, preventing all further efforts to unravel the knot from the front. The rear armoured car, trying to force its way between two abandoned lorries, became hopelessly jammed between them, forming an impassable obstacle.

A busload of Maliks arrived and tried to remove their fellow tribesmen by sweet reason. One, Koran in hand, was shot dead, and the rest prudently withdrew, abandoning their bus just where it contributed most to the blockage and confusion.

Douglas Robertson, a slight, very fair young man, was commanding the SWS fort at Tiarza, north-east of Wana.

> My HQ was at Tiarza with detachments at Wana and Tanai. I had made a visit to Wana and on the day in question had left on a gasht to visit a Wazir friend and hoping to pick up a few teal and snipe on the Wana Toi pools. I had left a helio on Gibraltar* and unfortunately just as we got to the first pool the helio began winking and we were ordered to return as *fast* as possible. We arrived to find the main road lined with lorries. I told my gasht to fill water-bottles, etc. and get

* Gibraltar. A high peak above Wana.

into the lorries. I asked for information but there was little except that the convoy had been ambushed. I asked for messages to be passed to Tanai and Sarwekai to order all but a few sentries to be ready in gashting order on the road. We picked up almost a platoon at Tanai and about as many at Sarwekai.

On arrival at Splitoi we found the Khassadars at their posts and the line through to Jandola. I spoke to the Commandant and was told to get down the road in a hurry and 'bail out the convoy'. Of course I said 'Yes, sir,' to him, but to myself, 'Like hell.'

I had a good look at the high hill (G2, Pt 3040) above Splitoi and decided Konia Khel would not have his rear protected. So I agreed with the Pathan officers we'd take that and work along the ridge and down the spurs. So we moved off well spread both laterally and in depth. We came under fire about half-way up and from there on individuals and pairs moved as and when they could from rock to rock. The bravest deed I saw that day was a Barak signaller walking down a spur waving his flag across his body to stop an armoured car firing at us.

We encircled the peak and pushed the Mahsuds off. I came round a huge rock face-to-face with a Mahsud coming round the other way. I winged him – we both fired together – and then like a damn fool followed him down the reverse slope. It was then that I was hit from the left. Entry just below shoulder, hit a rib and exited a quarter of an inch from my spine. Of course I was bowled over like a rabbit. In a flash my Orakzai orderly and a Khattak were down and had me back on top again, where field dressings were applied and I was strapped up like a dummy in two pagris. The dum-dum had left a large hole. They laid me in a fairly flat gully and wanted to evacuate me. I refused and spent the night there. Meanwhile the advance along the ridge and down the spurs was progressing well, and soon all quietened down.

Robertson got up, walked about and organised his gasht into an all-round defence of the peak for the night. They had a hand-to-hand fight in the darkness, bayonets, knives and grenades, and killed several Mahsuds. He walked into Splitoi in the morning, where Lowis got him to lie up.

While Robertson's and Cheeseman's gashts were shooting up the enemy from their rear, Lowis judged the time ripe to send the Maliks and Khassadars in. He sent sixty straight down the road into the Tangi. No one fired at them and they occupied the culverts and sangars from

which their fellow-Mahsuds withdrew. It was then possible to get thirteen more lorries out. This was the Khassadars' finest hour, and an unexpected end to the front of the convoy's long ordeal.

As it got dark, the enemy made repeated efforts to rush the convoy but except in two places were beaten off by fire from the armoured cars and survivors of the escort who were collected into small groups round each armoured car. At the same time Scouts from Splitoi worked to take out the wounded and extricate more lorries, an operation not helped by the fact that many were civilian vehicles of doubtful reliability, as indeed were the drivers. When at first light the Scouts advanced along the ridges and into the Tangi, they found the enemy had flitted. The last vehicles were removed during the afternoon, thirty hours after the ambush. The convoy losses were ninety-nine, including seven officers. The SWS had seven killed and two officers wounded. The enemy, initially only about eighty but increasing during the day to over three hundred, lost about sixteen killed and twenty-six wounded. It was evident that motor transport had not solved all convoy problems.

After this episode Konia Khel became Public Enemy Number One in South Waziristan, in disrepute even in his own tribe which did not want to be drawn into the Tori Khel's war. Lowis took up three Mahsud Maliks in a plane to try to identify his house.

> At first they were glum and almost sick. Then there was a yell as someone spotted it, and from then on things went with a swing. Picture the cabin, not very large, with three Mahsuds, Aslam (APO) and I bounding about and two British Other Ranks trying to take photographs.

But when the Scouts went to call on him, Konia Khel was not at home.

An attempt was made to take him out by bombing. A plane, laden with two 250-lb bombs, crash-landed on the steeply sloping football ground at Ladha and ended up nose-down in the perimeter wire, the bombs fortunately unexploded. Because Ladha was cut off by blown-up bridges and mined roads, the pilot and air-gunner remained Venning's involuntary guests for many weeks, Corporal Power proving a most effective trainer of 1st Wing football team.

Konia Khel was next seen in unexpected circumstances. Hugh Pettigrew and the SWS Subadar Major were invited to a farewell tea-party, in the Political Agent's garden in Tank, for Barnie Barnes on

his departure. 'Who', wrote Olaf Caroe, 'does not remember those farewell tea-parties when men who have made your life a burden for months and years all at once come round with fervent hand-clasps and, bidding you God-speed – could it be with a tear in the eye? – make you half believe that the burden was worth carrying?' There were about fifty Maliks, senior Khassadars and Scouts present, including some well-known hostiles who, as was customary, had come in under safe-conduct. Suddenly the Subadar Major leaned close to Pettigrew and whispered, 'Look, Sahib, at the next table, the tall man with a black beard. It's Konia Khel!' The worst cut-throat in Waziristan was placidly nibbling sweet biscuits and sipping tea in the Political Agent's garden, perfectly safe until he re-crossed the border into Tribal Territory.

The Resident, Waziristan, at that time was Johnny Johnson, the ex-cavalry trooper and former Commandant of the SWS. He adopted a surprisingly 'Political' bias: the tribesmen were never in the wrong, Scouts and Army always at fault. Lowis wrote that, 'Johnson's consumption [sic] of responsibility and clearness of decision are really first-rate. He does everything off his own bat and never consults anyone. Johnson is the hell of a chap.' But he was 'not impressive in a Jirga. Pushtu fluent but not good, delivery rotten. Barnie much better in Jirga.' This did not, perhaps, make for easy relations between them. When the Resident came on tour of South Waziristan, 'on at least two occasions Barnie called Johnson "Sir"!'

Barnie Barnes's swan-song in Waziristan was a real *tour de force*. Major-General A. F. Hartley (in Lowis's opinion 'an ignorant little tyke, both of mountain warfare and of tribal affairs, and anti-Barnes') ordered that the tower of a notorious hostile in Makin be demolished. The Politicals argued that this would bring the Mahsuds into the war.

So Barnie and Aslam after a fearful argument got the Maliks to undertake to demolish the kot and bring in the bad man. Armed with this undertaking, he tackled Hartley who, after more argument, agreed. There was a full-scale Jirga near Makin, camp sniped at night, but Hartley took it well. The Jirga was an hour and a half late in producing their man and there was more argument about burning the kot, an operation which had been stopped by rain. But at last they burnt it. This was a great achievement on Barnie's part. A hostile Makin on the L of C would have been serious.

Barnes became Political Agent, Zhob, where he was murdered by a fanatic across his office table.

12

War, 1937–8

Meanwhile the Tochi Scouts had had several successful chapaos intercepting Afghan tribesmen and Madda Khel Wazirs on their way to join the Tori Khel lashkars. One under Felix-Williams (hardly, perhaps, a Commandant's job) brought in eleven Mangals including two killed and two wounded; others accounted for fourteen Madda Khel.

On 30 April 1937 Jimmy Gimson was ordered to evacuate Khaisora post, which he had so recently built, as it was difficult to keep supplied and no longer served a useful purpose. 'We had an extremely strenuous twenty-four hours. We had to pull the whole place to pieces and I had orders to leave nothing whatever behind. However we got finished in time and sent back sixty-four lorries of stores.' Naturally the Faqir made the most of this, announcing that the Faranghis feared to stay in Khaisora and would soon be bolting from Razmak and Wana also. A number of optimists actually arrived in Wana with camels to carry away the loot.

Victor Wainright was on an operation with the Mounted Infantry.

One afternoon Guli Lal, the tough little roly-poly Seni Khattak Risaldar, told me that a patrol had brought in rather an odd chap, and it might be interesting for me to be in on the questioning. 'Dump your cigarette-case and lighter,' he said, 'and cadge Marouf's cigarettes. In your partog you'll pass as a Pathan, but if you want to talk you'd better rattle some stones in a tin can in your Afridi-brogue act.' Polite chap, our Guli.

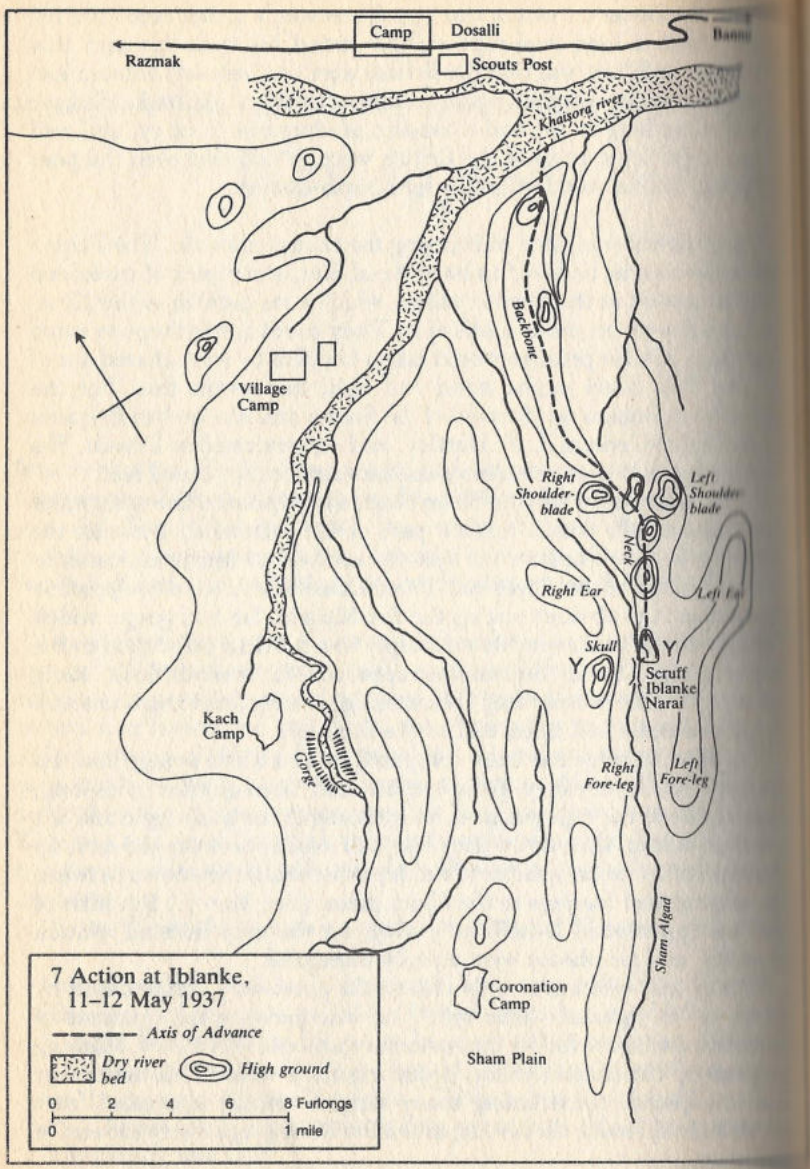
The prisoner turned out to be a Khostwal, a rather nice little old chap with a long heel-rope wound round his tum. He said that rumour in Khost was that the British were on their way out and loot was easy, so he was looking for a horse or mule to take back. We gave him something to eat and a handful of chupattis to carry, and told him to go home and say the British were so rich that even the poor Pathan Militia could afford to feed horse-thieves.

The problem remained of bringing the enemy to battle. The Faqir's headquarters was believed to be at Arsal Kot, a complex of caves and fortified towers in the Shaktu valley, which runs parallel to the Khaisora and five to ten miles south of it. They could hardly hope to catch him there, but his prestige would take a knock if he were chased out of it. The Tori Khel might stand and fight to prevent this. For the operation a division was formed of the Bannu and Abbotabad Brigades under Major-General A. F. Hartley, and concentrated at Dosalli. His orders were to defeat the enemy lashkars and occupy Arsal Kot.

The first objective was the Sham plain, a high plateau five to six miles south of Dosalli, which formed part of the watershed between the Khaisora and the Shaktu river systems and was an important summer grazing ground of the Tori Khel. From Dosalli there were two possible approaches: the obvious one up the Sre Mela nullah and gorge, which from the Sham plain runs down steeply in a northerly direction to the Khaisora near Dosalli; and another approach, far more difficult, along the top of the three-mile long Iblanke ridge, rising from north to south one to one and a half miles east of the Sre Mela.

The Iblanke ridge has been compared to a lean and mangy lion. Its tail is the Khaisora valley. Its spine, one and three-quarter miles long, rises steeply to the high points corresponding to the lion's right and left shoulder-blades; then down the neck (half a mile) between the ears, up the scruff of the neck (quarter of a mile) to the skull, then down between the outstretched forelegs to the Sham plain. (See Map 7.) But little of this was apparent in Dosalli on 7 May, for the map bore no relation to reality, and air-photos were equally unhelpful.

Hartley had taken over only two weeks previously. Stigmatised by Lowis as 'an ignorant little tyke', he was perhaps too ignorant of mountain warfare to follow the customary procedure of a slow, slogging progress up the nearest valley, piqueting as he went. This the enemy had anticipated, constructing many sangars artfully concealed from which he could make the forcing of the Sre Mela gorge a very expensive operation.



Hartley decided to outflank the enemy's preparations by a night dvance by the Bannu Brigade (commanded by Brigadier F. H. laynard) up the Iblanke ridge to the Sham plain. It was a very bold oncept. Maps and air-photos being useless, and reconnaissance impos- ible without giving the game away, he could rely only on recollections y sundry Scouts, who knew the route from past gashts. These cluded no British officers. Fortunately this was a popular gasht, for om the Iblanke Narai at the top the Orakzais could communicate by lio with Samana fort, in their home country. The consensus of inion was that the path along the ridge, although extremely difficult, as passable at night by laden mules. On this Jimmy Gimson staked his ilitary career and Hartley the Bannu brigade. Had the Scouts been rong, dawn might have found the brigade jam-packed and immobile n a knife-edge ridge, fired at from three sides and unable to bring its n weapons into action – recipe for a disaster far worse than that of he Guides at Wucha Jawar.

Since the essence of the plan was surprise, and Dosalli was crawling ith Wazir Maliks, Khassadars and contractors, a convincing ception-plan was necessary. Fortunately there was one at hand. rom Dosalli a road ran south-west to Razmak, eighteen miles away. ut the enemy had broken it in many places and sabotaged the pumping ation at Razani, six miles from Dosalli. What could be a more likely sk for the Army than to re-establish road-communications with azmak? Elaborate written orders were issued, with a wide circulation, r that operation, and Gimson was

> continually being sent for to answer questions about the country, water, etc. Yesterday morning I was out with a gasht from 7 am to 1 pm to protect a recce party, and no sooner had I returned than I was asked to take a sapper officer out to look at a possible camp-site 4 miles from here. It is a bad bit of country and I was worried we might find the enemy behind us as we started for home, however all was well. I was seized as soon as I got back to discuss a plan for Scouts to occupy a camp at Razani and am just about to go off with an armoured car to look at the place ... *Later*. Made two trips to possible sites at Razani. Water supply not enough. Decided to move Abbotabad brigade up the valley towards the Sham plain.

The last sentence refers to the establishment of a camp, known as Village Camp, one and three-quarter miles up the Sre Mela. This could e taken as the first move of an orthodox bash through the gorge, and