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Contribution of the Armed Forces to the Freedom Movement in India

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List of Abbreviations

ADC	Aide de Camp
AG	Adjutant General
AOC	Army Ordnance Corps,Air Officer Commanding
AOC-in-C	Air Officer Commanding-in- Chief
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BM	Brigade Major
BOAC	British Overseas Airways Cooperation
BOR	British Other Ranks
CCO	Central Communications Office
CSG	Chief of General Staff
C-in-C	Commander-in- Chief
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CIH	Central India Horse
CO	Commanding Officer
COS	Chief of Staff
COSC	Chiefs of Staff Committee
DFC	Distinguished Flying Cross
DMI	Director of Military Intelligence
DMO	Director of Military Operations
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
ECO	Emergency Commissioned Officer
FORCIN	Flag Officer Commanding Royal Indian Navy
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GOC-in-C	General Officer Commanding-in-Chief
GS	General Staff
HQ	Headquarters

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IAF	Indian Air Force
IAFVR	Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve
ICO	Indian Commissioned Officer
IPS	Indian Police Service
JCO	Junior Commissioned Officer
KCIO	king's Commissioned Indian Officer
MC	Military Cross
MLI	Maharatta (now Maratha Light Infantry)
MI	Military Intelligence
MO	Military Operations
MT	Mechanical Transport
NCO	Non Commissioned Officer
NWFP	North West Frontier Province
OR	Other Rank(s)
PBF	Punjab Boundary Force
POW	Prisoner of War
QMG	Quarter Master General
RAF	Royal Air Force
RIAF	Royal Indian Air Force
RIASC	Royal Indian Service Corps
2/Lt	Second Lieutenant
STC	Signal Training Centre
VC	Victoria Cross
VCO	Viceroy's Commissioned Officer
WRIN	Women's Royal Indian Navy

Glossary of Hindustani Terms

<i>bania</i>	merchant
<i>batta</i>	allowance
<i>bazaar</i>	market
<i>bhang</i>	intoxicant
<i>chaprasi</i>	peon
<i>dal</i>	lentils
<i>diwani</i>	the right to collect revenue
<i>ghadar</i>	Revolution
<i>gur</i>	jaggery
<i>Gurudwara</i>	place of worship for Sikhs
<i>Hartal</i>	strike
<i>hawai sepoy</i>	air soldiers
<i>jauhar</i>	collective self immolation by women
<i>khalasi</i>	labourer
<i>khalifa</i>	Caliph
<i>Khudai Khidmatgars</i>	Servants of God
<i>Kotes</i>	armouries
<i>langar</i>	free kitchen
<i>lota</i>	vessel for carrying water
<i>maulvi</i>	Muslim Priest
<i>pardesi</i>	foreigner
<i>rajas</i>	King, chieftain
<i>zamindar</i>	land owner

Prologue

The role of the Indian armed forces in the struggle for freedom from British rule has not been properly documented or publicised. The general public remains unaware and the nation's leaders have never acknowledged or appreciated the part played by the military in this important chapter of our history. As a result, the affected personnel have not been given recognition or reward for their efforts. In some cases, they were deprived of their livelihood and liberty, without compensation. There is a need to undo this injustice and acquaint the nation with armed forces' contribution to the freedom movement. This book attempts to undo this injustice and acquaint the nation with the soldier's contribution to the freedom movement.

India's independence from British rule in 1947 was achieved, after a protracted and sustained struggle that lasted several decades. It has a unique place in world history since it was characterised by non-violence, a novel form of rebellion popularised by Mahatma Gandhi. It was the only instance when a colonial power not only relinquished authority voluntarily but also advanced the date of its departure. The saga of India's freedom movement has been documented by scores of Indian and foreign authors. Though essentially non-violent, the movement had elements that involved the use of force, the most notable being the Indian National Army (INA) led by Subhas Chandra Bose. Scores of books have been written about the INA, even though its contribution in the attainment of independence was insignificant. On the other hand, with the exception of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, no historian has made more than a passing reference to the mutinies by personnel of the armed forces against British rule. These revolts occurred throughout the 200 odd years of British rule in India. Most of these uprisings were localised to small garrisons and occurred due to ill treatment,

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bad food, appalling living conditions, perceived injustice, lack of sensitivity to religious or ethnic sentiments etc. However, many were politically motivated and inspired by a spirit of nationalism—the most prominent being the Great Indian Mutiny of 1857, also called the First War of Indian Independence. Though the mutiny of 1857 was quelled, the spirit of nationalism that it kindled could not be extinguished. A number of smaller mutinies and revolts that took place during the next 90 years, especially during the two World Wars and immediately afterwards, were instrumental in the decision of the British government to pull out of India in August 1947.

Before starting work on this project, I had to take an important decision – whether or not to include the Indian National Army (INA). As it is well known, the INA was a Japanese sponsored force created from Indian prisoners of war during World War II. Many of those who joined the INA claimed they did so for patriotic reasons, and refute the charges of treason—as the act of going over to the enemy is regarded in the military— by arguing that after the fall of Singapore, they were handed over to the Japanese authorities by the British, who thereafter had no claim on their allegiance. This appears to be a strange argument, since after a mass surrender, the senior captured officer hands over charge of the men under this command to the victor. This is what Percival did after the fall of Singapore in 1942, and Niazi after the fall of Dacca in 1971. The act of being handed over to the enemy is a military custom, which does not absolve the captured soldiers from their allegiance or duty. It is also worth remembering that India was then at war with Japan, and joining the enemy to fight one's own compatriots could hardly be termed a patriotic act. This was realised by the leaders of the freedom struggle, who denounced the INA in no uncertain terms. Nehru even proclaimed that he would meet Bose 'sword in hand' if he tried to cross over into India. Most leaders, including Gandhi, trusted the British more than the Japanese, having heard of the atrocities committed by the latter in China. They knew that Japanese rule over India would be many times worse than that of the British, which in any case was about to end. Most important of all, they wanted to

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gain freedom on their own, not with the help of a foreign power.

Though Subhas Chandra Bose was a popular figure, the activities of the INA remained virtually unknown until the end of World War II. However, the Red Fort trials brought them into the limelight, thanks to the Congress, which found a cause to mobilise public opinion against British rule. Having opposed the INA during the War, the Congress leaders suddenly changes their stand, turning erstwhile villains into heroes. The Indian armed forces could not remain unaffected by this change, and opinions differed widely regarding the treatment of those who had broken their oath. Many felt that the soldiers who joined the INA had been untrue to their salt and deserved no sympathy, while others were of the opinion that they were genuine patriots, even if the methods adopted by them were wrong. This is often quoted as the reason for the mutinies that occurred in the three services early in 1946. A close examination reveals that the main ground of the three mutinies was the discrimination between British and Indian soldiers in matters of pay, food, accommodation, along with resentment against the harsh punishments awarded to the INA prisoners. Based on this, many INA veterans claim a major share of the credit for obtaining freedom from British rule. However, this argument is fallacious, since the INA had ceased to exist when these mutinies occurred. The mutineers were protesting against the British action taken against the INA personnel, which they felt was too harsh. This does not signify that they condoned the actions of the men in joining the INA and fighting alongside Japan, an enemy country. In fact, the feeling against them in the Indian Army was so strong that the Commander-in-Chief, Field Marshal Auchinleck, had to issue strict instructions to ensure the safety of the INA personnel who had become prisoners after the fall of Rangoon.

There are several other reasons for not upholding the claim of the INA of having contributed significantly to India's independence. None of the persons in authority who were responsible for the decision—Attlee, Pethick-Lawrence, Cripps, Wavell, or Mountbatten – have acknowledged or mentioned that the INA played a part in their discussions. The same applies

to the leaders of the freedom struggle such as Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah and many others. On the other hand, there is ample evidence that the Indian armed forces figured prominently in the deliberations that preceded the end of British rule in India. Having forsaken their allegiance to the Indian Army by joining the Japanese, INA personnel could not be treated as members of the Indian Army, unlike the other prisoners of war who elected to undergo hard labour and torture rather break their oath of loyalty.

It is significant that most of the books written by INA veterans make a pointed reference to their contribution to Indian independence, even in their titles. Examples are *Soldiers' Contribution to Indian Independence*, by 'General' Mohan Singh; *Forgotten Warriors of Indian War of Independence 1941-1946*; *Indian National Army* by Captain S.S. Yadav; *India's Struggle for Freedom* by Major General A.C. Chatterjee; and *The Impact of Netaji and INA on India's Independence* by Dr R.M. Kasliwal. Captain Yadav's book runs into three volumes and contains a list of all members of the INA, state wise. Surprisingly, most of these names are not to be found in the list of Indian soldiers who were captured by the enemy during World War II, which forms part of the official records maintained by the History Division of the Ministry of Defence.

Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was one of the greatest patriots produced by this country. The nationalism of most of the persons who joined the INA, especially the ones who did not wear a uniform, is also not in doubt. Many of them took grave risks, giving up lucrative businesses in Malaya, Thailand, Burma and Singapore to join the INA. However, the issue under consideration is not their objective—driving the British out from India—but whether they were able to achieve it, even partly. From the analysis given above, it is doubtful if they made a significant contribution to Indian independence. For this reason, the INA has been omitted from this study.

Though Indian soldiers, sailors and airmen continued to serve with commitment until the end, it would be wrong to assume that they did so willingly. The wave of nationalistic fervour sweeping through the country forced many of them to introspect their role in the freedom struggle, leaving

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some confused and insecure. The men naturally looked to their officers for guidance, who were equally uncertain about their future course of action. These issues, coupled with the growing aspirations for independence, became a source of concern for the military hierarchy, which was aware of the discontent and alienation of Indian officers. They tried to take remedial measures, but it was too late. By the time World War II ended, Indian officers had become true nationalists.

Most people in India, and indeed the world, believe that the chief architect of independence was Mahatma Gandhi, who confounded the British rulers with his new weapon—non violence—against which they had no defence. This may be the truth, but not the whole truth. Irrespective of official pronouncements from the Viceroy's House on Raisina Hill in Delhi or Whitehall in London, the British were loath to leave India, right up to the end of 1946. Even as the Cabinet Mission was trying to reconcile the differences between the Congress and Muslim League, the Chiefs of Staff in London were examining options to continue their hold on India. After rejecting options involving withdrawal from India for strategic reasons, they proceeded to work out the quantum of British troops that were required to keep the country under control, since the Indian armed forces could no longer be trusted. At one stage, the British government seriously considered a recruitment drive in Europe to raise the additional troops needed for this purpose. It was only after they failed to find the five British divisions that Auchinleck had asked for did they agree, very reluctantly, to quit India. Had the Indian armed forces remained staunch, there is little doubt that British rule would have continued for at least another 10 to 15 years. The nationalistic feeling that had entered the heart of the Indian soldier was one of the most important factors in the British decision to grant complete independence to India, and also to advance the date from June 1948 to August 1947.

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The Vellore Mutiny –1806

The mutiny at Vellore in 1806 has been termed by some historians as “The First War of Indian Independence”. It was the first major uprising by the Indian troops during the British Raj in India, resulting in the death of over a 100 Europeans, including over a dozen British officers. The mutiny was quelled as quickly as it flared up, thanks to the prompt response and resolute leadership by the commanding officer of a British battalion at Arcot, 16 miles away. Several hundred Indian soldiers were killed in the fighting, the rest being put under arrest. Justice was swift and severe, with several mutineers being executed or sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The disaffected units were disbanded and both the governor of the Madras Presidency as well as the commander-in-chief were recalled. The mutiny brought home to the British authorities the dangers of hurting the religious susceptibilities of Indian troops and disregarding the significance of caste. Unfortunately, these warnings were not heeded, leading to an even greater conflagration that almost ended British rule in India half a century later in 1857.

In 1799, the British attacked and captured Seringapatnam, the stronghold of Tipu Sultan, who died in the battle. Tipu’s family, including his four sons and their retinue, was interned in the fort at Vellore, where a large complement of the Madras Army was maintained. The garrison comprised two Indian battalions and a detachment of a British Crown regiment, having about 1,500 Indian and 370 European soldiers respectively. On 13 March 1806, Sir John Craddock, the commander-in-chief of the Madras Army, issued a new set of dress regulations, with a view to smarten up the soldiers.

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According to the new regulations, Indian soldiers of the Madras Army could no longer display caste marks on their foreheads or wear earrings. Beards were forbidden and moustaches had to be in accordance with a regulation pattern. They were also required to wear a new type of headgear. The orders were issued with the approval of the Madras government and the Governor, Lord William Bentinck, who was then only 32 years old.

The wearing of caste marks by Hindus was *de rigueur* for Hindus, while most Muslims wore the earring as a charm, given to them at birth and dedicated to some patron *pir* (saint). While beards were common in both communities, there was considerable difference in their shape and size. Muslims wore the beard but not the moustache, which was popular among Hindus. Another controversial regulation concerned the new head gear that troops were required to wear – a stiff round hat with a flat top, a leather cockade, and a standing feather. Resembling the tope worn by Europeans and Eurasians, it was no longer called a turban, but a *topi*. In the phraseology of the natives, a *topi-wallah* or hat-wearer was synonymous with a *feringhee* (white man) or Christian.¹

The promulgation of the new dress regulations caused considerable resentment among both Hindus and Muslims, who felt it was a direct attack on their religions. British officers who had been in India for long and realised the grave consequences of the new orders, did not communicate them to their troops and made representations to the authorities in Madras. One of them was the commanding officer of the subsidiary force at Hyderabad, Lieutenant Colonel Montresor, who decided in consultation with the Resident, to suspend the execution of the orders. Montresor's foresight prevented any untoward incident such as the one that occurred at Vellore, and he was later commended for his judicious measure.²

The garrison at Vellore comprised two Indian battalions, the 1st/1st and the 2nd/4th Madras Infantry. The orders regarding the new dress were received in Vellore in late April or early May. Here too, the commanding officer of the 1st/1st, Lieutenant Colonel M. Kerras (who was later killed in the mutiny) decided not to communicate to his men the paragraph that he considered offensive,

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which ordered: ...”a native soldier shall not mark his face to denote his caste, or wear earrings, when dressed in his uniform; and it is further directed that at all parades, and on all duties, every soldier of the battalion shall be clean shaved on the chin. It is directed also that uniformity shall as far as is practicable, be preserved in regard to the quantity and shape of the hair upon the upper lip”.³

However, it was not the orders concerning caste marks, earrings, beards and moustaches that caused the trouble, but the new headgear. On 7 May 1806, a company of the 2nd/4th Madras Infantry, respectfully but firmly declined to wear the new headgear. The news was immediately conveyed to Madras, and shortly afterwards, Sir John Cradock visited Vellore. In the meantime, a Court of Inquiry had been held and 19 men arrested by the commanding officer. Cradock ordered the guilty men sent to Madras for a court martial, which sentenced two of the arrested men to 900 lashes each while the rest were awarded 500 each. The sentence of 900 lashes was carried out on the first two, but the rest were pardoned after they apologised.

The 2nd/4th was moved from Vellore to Madras and the unrest appeared to have been subdued. However, reports of objections to the new headgear came in from several other stations, and in June Craddock wanted to rescind the orders. But the governor and his Council did not agree, since a Brahmin and a Syed had been consulted before issuing the new dress regulations. On 17 June 1806, a Muslim sepoy at Vellore, Mustafa Beg informed his commanding officer that a mutiny was in the offing. His report was referred to a committee of Indian officers who declared it false. This was only to be expected, since most of the Indian officers were themselves part of the conspiracy. However, the European officers at Vellore were out of touch with their men and failed to read the signs. Mustafa Beg was declared insane and imprisoned. (When the mutiny broke out, he escaped, but later returned and was given a reward of 2,000 pagodas and a subedar’s pension).⁴

The favour shown to Mustafa Beg caused bitter resentment among the sepoys. “The disposition of the gentlemen of the Company’s service,” they said, “and the nature of their government, make a thief happy, and an honest man

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afflicted". According to a paper transmitted to Adjutant General Agnew from the Hyderabad Subsidiary Force: "In the affair at Vellore, when the mutiny first commenced, it was on account of Mustapha Beg; and the gentlemen of the Company's Government have bestowed upon him a reward of two thousand pagodas, with the rank of Soubahdar. The same Mustapha Beg, Sepoy, was the man who gave the signal for the revolt to the people at Vellore, and this is the man whom the Company have distinguished by their favour." ⁵

The mutiny at Vellore broke out on the night of 9 July 1806. At about 3 am the sepoys attacked the barracks of the European soldiers of the 69th Regiment, killing over 100 and wounding many more. Over a dozen officers were shot down as they emerged from their houses to find out what was going on. The survivors managed to barricade themselves in a bastion above the main gateway where they held out, the mutineers soon dispersing in search of plunder. After looting the houses of the officers many of them left the fort. A British officer, Major Coats, who was outside the fort rushed to Arcot, 16 miles distant, where a British cavalry regiment and some Madras cavalry were located. Within 15 minutes of getting the news, Lieutenant Colonel Rollo Gillespie, commanding the 19th Dragoons, galloped off to Vellore with one squadron; the rest, with the Madras cavalry squadron and some galloper guns (horse artillery), followed shortly afterwards.

Gillespie reached Vellore shortly after 8 a.m. Fortunately, the outer gates of the fort had been left open and only the inner gate was shut. Gillespie had himself hauled up to the ramparts by a rope let down by the beleaguered survivors and immediately assumed command. At about 10 a.m. the galloper guns arrived, the inner gate was blown in and the cavalry poured into the fort. The mutineers offered little resistance and in ten minutes, the fort was again in British hands. Between 300 to 400 mutineers were killed on the spot, with several others being made prisoner. Many of the mutineers who escaped by jumping down from the walls were rounded up later. A few of them were tried and executed, six being blown from guns, five shot, eight hanged and five transported. Most of the remainder were discharged, and the units were disbanded.⁶

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Other than Vellore, there was some unrest at Hyderabad, Nundydroog, and Pallamcottah. In Hyderabad, Lieutenant Colonel Montresor had recently taken over command of the Hyderabad Subsidiary Force. He had imposed several local restrictions, such as banning the use of drums and tom-toms in the *bazaar*, which were commonly used in marriage and religious processions. Immediately after the outbreak of the mutiny at Vellore, he decided to revoke the orders regarding the new dress, in anticipation of instructions from the Madras government. The new dress regulations were cancelled on 17 July 1806, and this seemed to remove the immediate source of anger. However, the troops in Hyderabad were not satisfied and reiterated their old grievance of the leather stock, which some of them threw on the ground during a parade. On 14 August 1806 the troops were paraded under arms, with a British regiment – the 33rd – along with some artillery and cavalry drawn up on both flanks. Four subedars who were believed to be the ring leaders were called to the front, arrested and marched off under a guard to Masulipatam. This nipped the problem in the bud, and there was no further sign of trouble.⁷

The native troops at Nundydroog planned to rise against and massacre their British officers at midnight on 18 October 1806 and quietly sent their families out of the fort. At about eight in the evening of the fateful day, A British officer galloped to the house of the Commandant, Colonel Cuppage and told him about the planned mutiny. Shortly afterwards, an old and distinguished native officer came with the same intelligence. Cuppage immediately despatched a messenger with an urgent appeal for reinforcements to Colonel Davis commanding the 22nd Regiment of Dragoons in Bangalore. One of the officers' houses that was considered suitable for defence was selected, into which all officers congregated and took post. Davis received the news soon after daybreak and by three o'clock his troopers were clattering into Nundydroog.⁸

Pallamcottah was located in the southernmost part of the peninsula. Major Welsh, with six European officers, commanded a native battalion that had many sepoys whose relatives had been killed at Vellore. In the third week

of November 1806, intelligence was received that the Muslim soldiers had met in the mosque and planned to rise and kill all the Europeans. Welsh immediately arrested and confined 13 native officers, and turned about 500 Muslim sepoys out of the fort. He also sent a letter by country boat to Ceylon, calling for European troops. Two days later, Colonel Dyce, who commanded the Tinnivelly district, arrived in Pallamcottah and addressed the Hindu troops, who were asked if they wanted to serve the Company or leave. All the men went up to the Colours, presented arms and took the oath, following it up with three unbidden cheers. Major Welsh was later severely condemned as an alarmist and had to face a court martial, but was honourably acquitted.⁹

The large number of Europeans killed in Vellore set alarm bells ringing throughout British India and in London. The Governor, Lord William Bentinck quickly ordered a Commission of Inquiry to investigate into the circumstances connected with the mutiny. The president of the commission was Major General J. Pater, the other members being Lieutenant Colonel G. Dodsworth; Nathaniel Webb, Senior Judge of the Appeal Court; J.H.D. Oglivie, Second Judge of Circuit; Major W. Douse and J. Leith, the judge advocate general, who also functioned as the secretary. The commission assembled at Vellore on 21 July and submitted its report on 9 August 1806. It found two major reasons for the outbreak of the mutiny : the changes in dress and the presence of the family of Tipu Sultan at Vellore.

The officers of the two units who were examined confessed that they had no inkling of the resentment felt by the men because none of them had expressed any dissatisfaction against the issue of the new headgear. However, examination of other witnesses confirmed that they found it highly offensive. Though the turban was made of broadcloth covering an iron frame, it also had a cotton tuft resembling a feather and a leather cockade. It was the last item that the sepoys disliked, other than the shape which resembled a tope or European hat. The commission felt that the “sepoys appear to feel that the wearing of the new turban would make them come to be considered as Europeans, and would have removed them from the society and intercourse

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of their own castes.” Though such prejudices may appear unreasonable, the commission judiciously commented, “Prejudices would cease to be so, could they be regulated by reason.”

Continuing on the subject of the strong religious feelings and prejudices prevalent in India, the commission remarked:

In this country, the prejudices of the conquered have always triumphed over the arms of the conqueror, and have subsisted amidst all the revolutions and shocks to which the empire has been subjected. Any innovation, therefore, in that respect, must be calculated to call forth their feelings, and the more trivial the object required to be sacrificed, the stronger, in our opinion, would be the reluctance to make it. Nothing could appear more trivial to the public interests than the length of hair on the upper lip of a sepoy, yet to the individual himself the shape and fashion of the whisker is a badge of his caste, and an article of his religion. And the sanctity in which this article is held has occasioned revolutions in different eastern nations, rather than suffer it to be violated.¹⁰

The commission went at great lengths to investigate the involvement of the sons of Tipu Sultan, especially the youngest, Prince Moizuddin. While the family of Tipu was interned in the palace in the fort, under the care of Colonel Mariott, a large number of followers had settled down in the vicinity at Pettah. The residents of the Pettah intermingled with the Muslim sepoys of the regiments in the fort, and were suspected to have conspired with them in the mutiny. On the night of the 9 July, the wedding of one of Tipu’s daughters, Princess Noor-ul-Nissum, was being celebrated in the palace, and a large crowd had assembled to watch the proceedings. It was reported that many of the followers from the palace helped the mutineers as soon as the firing started. The flag of Tipu Sultan was also brought out and hoisted on the garrison flagstaff by the sepoys and the followers. Though the commission could not find any concrete evidence of the direct involvement of any of Tipu’s sons in the mutiny, it relied on the statements of Colonel Mariott,

who suspected Prince Moizuddin, due to certain events that occurred in the days preceding the mutiny, such as his request to purchase a horse, and to permit one of his cousins to spend the night with him in the palace. Though Mariott refused both requests, he thought they were enough evidence of the evil intentions of Prince Moizuddin.

The Madras government initially advanced the theory that the Vellore mutiny was part of a widespread plot to expel the British and restore Muslim authority. Bentinck supported this view in his first report to the governor-general at Fort William. Based on Bentinck's report the council at Fort William wrote to London on 30 July 1806, clearly stating: "We deem it highly probable that the insurrection was instigated by one or more of the sons of Tippoo sultan confined in the Fort".¹¹ However, Bentinck modified his views after the Commission of Inquiry was unable to find any evidence to support this theory. The next report to London dated 26 August 1806, stated: "No attempts appear to have been made by the sons of Tippoo Sultan to excite revolt in Mysore and that no appearance or commotion exists or has existed in that country".¹²

In spite of finding no direct evidence of the involvement of Tipu's sons, the British authorities could not seem to get it out of their heads. A subsequent report to London dated 1 October 1806 stated: "With regard to the second point we have decidedly formed the following conclusions – That the strongest assumption and even positive evidence exists in proof that Sultan Moozoodeen, the fourth son of the late Tippoo Sultan, was actively concerned in the insurrection. That scarcely any ground of suspicion is established against the Prince Mohieudeen, the third and only legitimate son and that the rest of the sons and relatives of the family are entirely free from guilt". The report also indicated the measures intended to be taken with regard to the future treatment of the sons of Tipu, who were all to be "detained" permanently in Bengal, with Prince Moizuddeen kept in a state of "strict confinement", separately from the others.¹³

There was a divergence of views between Fort William and Fort St. George with regard to the treatment of the sepoys. The former wanted all "men who

did not side with the British or were absent” to be sent to other regiments and the two units disbanded, the men sent to Cape Prince of Wales Island Battalion and Malacca. The Madras Council did not agree with this view, arguing that discharging all men will aggravate the situation and was dangerous, as it may spread disaffection. However, the Governor General’s Council at Calcutta insisted on exemplary punishment to the majority of men and banishment from India for the rest.¹⁴

Apart from the family of Tipu Sultan and the sepoys, action was also taken against the Governor of Madras, Lord William Bentinck and his Commander-in-Chief, Sir John Craddock. Both were considered responsible for the outbreak and were recalled. A year later, Lord Minto came out to India as governor-general. He was struck by the mutual ignorance of each other’s motives, intentions and actions in which the Europeans and natives seemed content to live in India. “I do not believe that either Lord William or Sir John Craddock had the slightest idea of the aversion their measures would excite. I fully believe that their intentions were totally misapprehended by the natives.”¹⁵

The controversial dress regulations were cancelled on 17 July 1806. This was followed by a general order on 24 September 1806, according to which “interference with the native soldiery in regard to their national observances was strictly prohibited”. Another measure taken by the Court Of Directors in London was downgrading the position and authority of the commander-in-chief. Craddock’s successor, Lieutenant General Hay McDowell was not included in the Governor’s Council, as his predecessors had been. The directors’ reason for doing this was Craddock’s error of judgment that caused the Vellore mutiny. However, the measure caused considerable resentment in the Madras Army, and was partly responsible for the serious unrest among officers in 1809.¹⁶

The mutiny at Vellore was the first major mutiny by Indian troops after the establishment of British rule in India, in which a large number of Europeans were killed in an attempt to overthrow the British and reestablish Muslim rule in Mysore. It was a warning to the British that Indian soldiers could rise if their religious sensibilities or caste prejudices were hurt. Unfortunately,

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the British authorities in India could not read these signs, and had to face their greatest challenge 50 years later, when the greased cartridges were issued to Indian troops, leading to the holocaust of 1857.

Notes

This chapter is largely based on J.W Kaye's *A History of the Sepoy War in India*, (London, 1877); Sir Penderel Moon's *The British Conquest and Dominion of India*, (London, 1989); and Military Department Records in the National Archives of India. Specific references are given below:

1. J.W Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India*, Vol. I, (London, 1877), p. 218.
2. General letter from the Council to the Secret Committee of the Court of Directors, The East India Company; Foreign Department – Secret Letters to Court 1806, National Archives of India (NAI), 26 August 1806.
3. Report of the Commission of Inquiry assembled on 9 August 1806, for the Investigation of the Circumstances connected with the Mutiny at Vellore; NAI, House of Commons papers, 1861 (HC 284), p.2.
4. Penderel Moon, *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (London, 1989), p. 351.
5. Kaye, p. 227.
6. Lt. Gen. S.L. Menezes, *Fidelity & Honour* (New Delhi, 1993), p.100.
7. Kaye, note 1, p. 237.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 239.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 241.
10. Report of the Commission of Inquiry, p. 5.
11. Secret Letters to Court 1806, (NAI), 30 July 1806.
12. Secret Letters to Court 1806, (NAI), 26 August 1806.
13. Secret Letters to Court 1806, (NAI), 1 October 1806.
14. Secret Letters to Court 1806, (NAI), 20 December 1806.
15. Moon, note 4, p.352, quoting Countess Minto (ed), *Lord Minto in India*, p. 309.
16. Menezes, note 6, p.102.

2

The Barrackpore Mutiny – 1824

The mutiny at Barrackpore in 1824 is important for many reasons, not the least being the ferocity with which it was suppressed. In a misplaced desire to punish indiscipline, fire was opened on Indian troops without warning or provocation, resulting in several deaths and injuries. The incident elicited universal condemnation from all quarters, especially those who had spent long years with Indian troops. As an example of brutality the bloodshed at Barrackpore was matched only by the massacre at Jallianwala that was to occur almost a hundred years later. The tragic episode continued to haunt Britons and Indians for many years, and many felt that it provided Indian soldiers the rationale to kill British officers in 1857. Like in the revolt at Vellore, the ignorance and arrogance of senior British officers were the major factors responsible for the Barrackpore mutiny.

From modest beginnings in the middle of the 18th century, British presence in India continued to expand rapidly, and by 1820, almost half the Indian subcontinent was under British rule. These territorial gains had been obtained by force of arms, with the assistance of Indian troops serving in the three Presidency armies. During this period they conducted successful military campaigns against the French in South India, Siraj-ud-daula and Mir Kasim in Bengal; Hyder Ali and his son Tipu Sultan in Mysore; the Marathas in central India and the Gurkhas in Nepal. By the time Lord Hastings left India in 1922 after having spent ten years as governor-general, the United Company of Merchants Trading to the East Indies, commonly known as the East India Company, was the Paramount Power in India. In 1923, Lord

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Amherst came to India as governor-general. Soon afterwards, the British were confronted with a new enemy – Burma.

Like the British in India, from the middle of the 18th century, the Burmese dynasty based at Ava had embarked on a career of conquest. After gaining control of the Irrawaddy delta and the Tenasserim coast, they invaded the then independent state of Arakan in 1784 and made it part of their kingdom. This brought them in direct contact with the eastern frontier of Bengal, which was under British control. In 1813, they seized the kingdom of Manipur, forcing the ruler to seek refuge in the neighbouring state of Cachar. In 1818, they took control of Assam, installing a ruler who agreed to accept Burmese suzerainty. The conflict between the Burmese and the British started over the refugees from Arakan who had been permitted by the latter to occupy the waste tracts in the Chittagong district. The Burmese demand for the refugees to be returned was refused after it was found that the few who had been sent back were starved to death. Buoyed by their success, the Burmese laid claim to Dacca and Chittagong and threatened to attack and capture Bengal if their demands were not met. In September 1823, the Burmese occupied the small island of Shahpuri at the mouth of the river that divided Chittagong and the Arakan, overpowering the small British guard that was stationed there. This led to a declaration of war with Burma, though the directors hoped that war could still be averted. However, this was not to be and the incident marked the beginning of the First Burmese War.

The British plan for operations against Burma consisted of a seaborne expedition to Rangoon from where a force would be transported up the Irrawaddy to attack the Burmese capital of Ava. The expedition left Port Cornwallis in April 1824 with a force of 11,000 soldiers, of whom half were European and the rest Indian troops from the Madras Army, who had no compunction regarding crossing the sea. Rangoon was captured without difficulty, the town having been evacuated under orders of the government. As a result, the British could not find any provisions, boats or boatmen, which they had counted on for the subsequent expedition to Ava. The rains started

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soon afterwards, and the force had no option but to wait at Rangoon until the monsoons ended and supplies arrived from Madras. Meanwhile, in May 1824, a Burmese force of 8,000, under the command of Maha Bandula, advanced towards Chittagong, routing a detachment of 300-400 Indian sepoy and some local levies at Ramu. Most of the British officers were killed and the captured sepoy sent as prisoners to the Burmese capital. This caused panic in Calcutta, it being reported that the Burmese had captured Chittagong and were pushing up in war-boats to capture Calcutta. There were many rumours, each more outlandish than the other: Bhandula was carrying a set of golden fetters for the governor general; the commander-in-chief had been killed; the governor-general had committed suicide, swallowing pounded diamonds and so on. Indeed, Bhandula might well have captured Chittagong, which was virtually undefended, had he not been recalled from the Arakan to deal with the seaborne invasion of Rangoon. ¹

Dismayed by the failure of the sea-borne expedition to Rangoon, the British authorities decided on an overland advance into Burma. Two expeditions were planned, one from Cachar via Manipur to northern Burma and the other from Chittagong across the Arakan into the Irrawaddy valley, where it could link up with the Rangoon force. The expedition from Cachar was to comprise 7,000 soldiers, while the Arakan force was larger, with 11,000 troops with naval support. Three regiments of the Bengal Army stationed at Barrackpore, the 26th, 47th and 62nd, were earmarked for the Arakan campaign. Barrackpore was the headquarters of the Presidency Division, under the command of Major General Dalzell. The commander-in-chief of the Bengal Army was General Sir George Paget, a veteran of the Peninsular War, who had never served with Indian troops earlier.

The three regiments at Barrackpore received orders to march to Chittagong in October 1824. The decision to march was taken because most of the soldiers in the Bengal Army were high caste Brahmins, who were averse to a sea voyage. The three regiments had just marched almost 1,000 miles from Muttra (now Mathura). For some regiments, frequent moves on

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foot seemed to be the norm. For instance, the 47th had moved no less than four times in as many years between 1807 and 1811; in 1814, it marched 500 miles from Barrackpore to Benares; in 1816, it moved to Dinapur, 300 miles away; and in 1818, it marched 500 miles to Agra. The men were reluctant to undertake another long march, this time against an unknown enemy. Stories about the Burmese success at Ramu could not have left the sepoy unaffected. Some of these stories extolled the military prowess of the Burmese troops and credited them with magical powers. They were also rumoured to torture prisoners and mutilate the dead.

Apart from fear and fatigue, another reason for the reluctance of the men was the great financial hardship they faced during each move. Each high caste soldier customarily carried his own brass utensils for cooking and drinking water, wrapped in a bundle that also included his bedding. Because of their weight, these bundles could not be carried by the soldiers in addition to their knapsacks, muskets and ammunition, and were usually transported on bullocks, which they hired at their own expense. For the march to Chittagong, no bullocks could be found, since all the available animals had already been purchased for the sea-borne expedition to Rangoon. The few bullocks that were available were of inferior quality and quoted exorbitant rates that were beyond the means of the sepoy, who requested that the government should provide the bullocks or pay them an additional allowance. The commanding officer of the 47th Regiment forwarded the representation of the men to the commander-in-chief, but received an unsympathetic response. The situation was not improved by threats by the Muslim subedar major that if they did not stop complaining about the bullocks, they would be sent by sea.²

On 1 November 1824, the day they were to commence their march, the men of the 47th Regiment assembled on the parade ground but refused to fall in, complaining that their knapsacks were old and torn. Though a deduction had been levied two months earlier, new knapsacks had not yet been provided and the men's grievance was genuine. Their officers tried to reason with them but the men were adamant, making it clear that they would

not march unless their pay was increased or bullocks provided to them. This information was conveyed to the Commander-in-Chief, General Paget, who immediately ordered two British battalions, a company of artillery, a troop of the governor general's bodyguard and one native regiment to proceed to Barrackpore, and reached there himself that night.

News of the happenings in 47th Regiment reached the other two affected units, the 26th and 62nd Regiments that were located nearby. The commanding officer of the 26th, Lieutenant Colonel D'Aguiliare, had deployed his unit in accordance with instructions received from Major General Dalzell. The Right Company and Regimental Colours were detailed as an honorary guard to the commander-in-chief while the Left Company was detailed for a similar duty for the governor general. Two companies were detailed to cover the guns under Captain Hodgson, and the remainder of the officers and men stayed in the lines, with their arms. These measures were probably taken with a view to disperse the unit, so that the disaffection of the 47th does not spread to the other units.³

At about 8 pm, the commanding officer of the 62nd Regiment, Major B. Roope, came to know that some men from the Left Half had made a rush on the quarter guard and forcibly taken away the Colours. Roope rushed to the parade ground where he found the whole battalion in a disorderly mass. They were all carrying their rifles, many of which were loaded. Other officers also reached the parade ground and asked the men to fall in. Some of them obeyed immediately, while others dallied, forming up slowly in small groups. However, the men who had snatched the Colours refused to fall in. Major Roope, who was mounted, started moving slowly through the ranks towards the Colours around which he concluded the "bad characters" had collected. When he was within a few paces of the Colours, his horse's head was forcibly turned and he was struck in the back with muskets. According to Major Roope, "A man who carried one of the Colours and is supposed to be one of the principal instigators was upto that night considered one of the best men in the Corps, so difficult is it to find out the character of the Natives."⁴

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In the 26th Regiment, a report reached Lieutenant Colonel D'Aguiare at about midnight that the Left Half of 62nd had joined the 47th Regiment with their Colours. He also heard the bugle salute of the 47th Regiment, which confirmed this report. Hearing a noise from the direction of his own quarter guard, D'Aguiare rushed towards it, where he was informed that some of his grenadiers had snatched the King's Colours from the guard room and gone towards the 47th Regiment. Sending Lieutenant Robe to report to Major General Dalzell, D'Aguiare ordered a roll call of his unit, which at that time consisted of 202 men in addition to 192 Benares Provincials. About ten men of the Left Company were found absent, in addition to the Subedar Major, who was later found to have gone to General Dalzell. Soon after this, Lieutenant Robe returned and intimated the orders of General Dalzell, which was to move the men to the regiment's other Colour at the residence of the commander-in-chief. This was done without any protest or misgiving from the men.⁵

Early the next morning the powerful force of mainly British troops took up their position on the parade ground of the 47th Regiment, whose sepoys, joined by some men from the 26th and the 62nd, stood with their arms in front of their lines. They presented a petition to the commander-in-chief expressing their fear that they were going to be sent by ship to Rangoon which would make them lose caste; they begged to be discharged and allowed to go home. Paget replied that there was no intention of sending them by sea without their consent, but refused to listen any further to what they had to say until they had ground their arms. To this the men paid no heed. Three officers, who were thought to have some influence over them were sent to warn them that they must either ground their arms or agree to march immediately to Chittagong; but the men did not comply, standing "with ordered arms in a state of stupid desperation, resolved not to yield, but making no preparation to resist".

Paget galloped off the parade ground and ordered the guns to open fire. The men were not aware of the presence of the guns, and were not given any

warning before artillery fire was opened. The men instantly broke and fled, flinging down their muskets and running off in all directions. At least 60 were killed by the artillery, a few sabred by the cavalry and 20-30 drowned while trying to swim across the Ganges. Many were wounded and taken prisoner. After the firing had ceased, the 26th Regiment, which had been kept in the house appropriated for the commander-in-chief, was ordered to scour the lines of the 47th, and then move towards the burial ground. Two men who were found hiding in a tank were placed under arrest. A court martial, held the same day, sentenced 41 men to death, 12 of whom were hanged next morning. The sentences of the others were commuted to 14 years imprisonment with hard labour and many more convicted later were given similar sentences. All the Indian officers were dismissed, even though they had taken no part in the mutiny, it being argued that they must have known about the conspiracy. The 47th Regiment was disbanded and its number effaced from the army list.⁶

Paget's handling of the situation came in for severe criticism at that time and for ever afterwards. He was reputed to be a hard disciplinarian with no knowledge of Indian troops. What was worse, he had a bitter prejudice against native troops, forgetting that they had been largely responsible for winning for Britain her territories in India. He later told the House of Commons that there prevailed in the native army, both among officers and men, 'a great spirit of insubordination'. Many felt that if a senior India service officer of strong personality like Thomas Munro, John Malcolm or David Ochterlony had been present, the bloodshed would not have occurred. The directors were also unhappy with the role of the Governor-General, Lord Amherst, who treated the whole episode as a purely military matter, leaving it entirely to Paget to handle. He made no comment on the inquiry proceedings that were sent to London, prompting the directors to contemplate his recall for his lack of interest.

Unknown to the British officers, the men of the 47th who died on 2 November 1824 became martyrs in the Bengal Army. After the outbreaks at Meerut and Delhi, the Calcutta *Englishman* of 30 May 1857 recorded:

‘A circumstance has come to our knowledge which, unless it has been fully authenticated, we could scarcely have believed to be possible, much less true. When the mutiny at Barrackpore broke out in 1824, the ringleader, a Brahmin of the 47th Native Infantry, was hanged on the edge of the tank where a large tree now stands, and which was planted on the spot to commemorate the fact. This tree, a sacred banyan, is pointed out by the Brahmins and others to this day, as the spot where an unholy deed was performed, a Brahmin hanged. This man was, at that time, considered in the light of a martyr, and his brass ‘pootah’ or worshipping utensils, consisting of small trays, incense-holders, and other brass articles used by Brahmins during their prayers, were carefully preserved and lodged in the quarter-guard of the (Barrackpore) regiments, where they remain to this day, they being at this moment in the quarter-guard of the 43rd Light Infantry at Barrackpore. These relics, worshipped by the sepoys, have been, for thirty-two years, in the safe keeping of the regiments, having, by the operation of the daily relief of the quarter-guard, passed through the hands of 233,600 men and have served to keep alive, in the breasts of many, the recollection of a period of trouble, the scene of a mutiny and its accompanying swift and terrible punishment, which, had these utensils not been present to their sight as confirmation, would probably have been looked upon as fables, or, at the most, as very doubtful stories.’⁷

The memory of the massacre in Barrackpore was an important factor in the bloodshed that occurred in 1857-58. Philip Mason has quoted an old Indian officer as saying, “They are your men whom you have been destroying” He added: “He could not trust himself to say more ...(Paget) could surely have avoided that sudden and brutal act which, like Dyer’s at Amritsar a hundred years later, suggests a man using power to vent a deep dislike which had perhaps grown stronger for being long suppressed. These two cases, Vellore and Barrackpore, set the pattern of the mutiny. They were a warning to which few paid attention.”⁸

The mutiny at Barrackpore in 1824 occurred due to seemingly trivial reasons - the availability of bullocks and knapsacks and increase in pay. The

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misplaced fear of being sent by sea may also have played a part. However, what shocked everyone was the mutiny itself but the brutal manner in which it was quelled. The bloodshed could have been avoided if the situation had been handled with tact and understanding by the officers, particularly General Paget. Though the mutiny was quickly suppressed - it lasted for less than a day – its long term effects were far reaching and had a bearing on the Great Indian Mutiny of 1857.

Notes

This chapter is largely based on Sir Penderel Moon's *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (London, 1989); Lt Gen. S.L. Menezes' *Fidelity & Honour* (New Delhi, 1993); and Military Department Records in the National Archives of India. Specific references are given below:

1. Penderel Moon, *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (London, 1989), pp. 433-435.
2. Lt Gen. S.L. Menezes, *Fidelity & Honour* (New Delhi, 1993), pp.107-108.
3. Statement of Lieutenant Colonel D'Aguiare, commanding 26th Native Infantry, Military Department, National Archives of India (NAI), 3 November 1824.
4. Note 3.
5. Statement of Lieutenant Colonel D'Aguiare, NAI, 3 November 1824.
6. Moon, note 1, pp. 438-439.
7. Menezes, note 2, pp.109-110.
8. Philip Mason, *A Matter of Honour* (London, 1974), p. 246.

3

The Great Indian Mutiny – 1857

The uprising of 1857 that British historians christened the Sepoy Mutiny or the Great Indian Mutiny was in fact not a mere rebellion but an Armageddon. Though it began as a mutiny by soldiers in the service of the East India Company, it soon turned into a conflict between two peoples, one enslaved by the other for over a hundred years. The objective of the insurrection being freedom from British bondage, Indian historians had good reason to term it the “first war of independence.” Whatever its appellation, there is little doubt that it was a watershed in the history of the subcontinent and a turning point in the Indo-British relations. For the first time since the beginning of British rule in India, the seeds of nationalism were germinated in the heart of every Indian, irrespective of his religion and caste. It would take 90 years for the plant to grow and bear fruit. Hundreds of thousands of people took part in India’s freedom struggle, many sacrificing their youth and their careers, some even their lives. But it is important to remember that in 1857, it was the common soldier who kindled the flame that finally lighted up the lives of all Indians.

The Mutiny lasted well over a year and ended only after the Proclamation by Queen Victoria on 1 November 1858 ending the rule of the East India Company in India, though sporadic revolts continued even after this. Though the major events took place in northwestern provinces (Agra and Oudh), there were few parts of the subcontinent that remained untouched. Much has been written about the Mutiny and it is, therefore, not intended to cover it in detail in this chapter. However, the principal events that occurred at

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important stations will be briefly mentioned, along with the principal causes of the Mutiny and its consequences. More importantly, the role that it played in the struggle for freedom from British rule will be examined.

Unlike their predecessors of foreign origin who ruled over India, the British did not invade the country. When they first arrived, it was not with the aim of conquest, but trade. In fact, of the several European nations which had a presence in the subcontinent, the British were the only ones without any mandate or support from their government. The United Company of Merchants of England Trading to the East Indies, which later came to be known as the East India Company, saw in India, as they did in China and several other countries in the East, an opportunity to make huge profits. The British soldiers they employed to guard their factories and warehouses, proved to be inadequate, forcing them to recruit additional numbers from the local population. This gave birth to the Company's army, the forebears of the present day Indian Army. Even after the arrival of regular British troops of the King's or Queen's Army in later years, the Company's Army retained its distinct identity, right up to 1857.

After gaining a foothold, the British proceeded to subdue the local rulers by military force and acquire territory. In the initial years, they had to compete with the French, Dutch and Portuguese who had similar designs. Displaying superior military prowess and political acumen, they soon defeated other European forces as well as local potentates and their power and influence increased rapidly. With territorial gains came added responsibilities and the Company soon found itself performing the role of the ruler that it had displaced. Motivated by a genuine desire to provide an efficient administration and improve the lot of the common people, social and economic reforms began to be introduced. With arrogance born of a firm belief in their superiority, they failed to consider the effects of these measures on a people who valued caste and religion above everything, including their lives. In spite of their foreign descent, the Mughals were aware of the role of religion and caste in India and took special care to avoid measures that hurt

local sensibilities on this account. The only exception, Aurangzeb, proved to be the last of the Great Mughals. It was a lesson the British should have learned but did not.

Since the British professed to have come to India for trade, in the initial years they did not assume the mantle of rulers despite the fact that they had gained control of considerable tracts of territory. Even after become the virtual rulers of Carnatic and Bengal the Company did not assume sovereign powers. Clive approached the emperor at Delhi for grant of *Diwani* (the right to collect revenue) in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Though they had become de facto rulers, the British continued to propagate the myth that they were acting as agents of the emperor. It was only in the second or third decade of the 19th century, when they were confident of their power that they began to assert their independence and authority. They encouraged the Nawab Wazir of Oudh to declare himself as the king; struck coins in the name of the Company and replaced Persian with English as the language in the court. These measures caused alarm among the populace and local chieftains, who realised the real intentions of the British in India. With each new act that affirmed their status as rulers rather than agents, discontent and apprehension among the common people increased, culminating in the outburst of 1857.

The first instance of a slight to the religious prejudices of the Indian soldier occurred in 1806, resulting in the mutiny at Vellore. This was followed by the unfortunate events in Barrackpore in 1824, where sepoy of the Bengal Army were fired upon merely for refusing to proceed for duty overseas, an act which would have resulted in loss of caste and social ostracization. The brutal manner in which these mutinies were suppressed convinced the sepoy that their British masters were indifferent to their religious feelings. Shortly after the Barrackpore incident, the British abolished the ancient Hindu practice of *sati* (self immolation of widows on the funeral pyres of their husbands). Educated and enlightened Indians such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy welcomed the measure, but the common people saw in it another assault on their religion.

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In 1939, the British invaded Afghanistan, marking the beginning of the First Afghan War that ended in 1942. It was an unmitigated disaster, in which hundreds of British soldiers and thousands of Indian sepoy lost their lives. Most of those who were captured were enslaved and converted to Islam. The lucky few who were rescued by a relief force returned to find that they had become outcasts in their own homes. According to Sardar Bahadur Hedayet Ali, a subedar in Rattrays' Sikhs, the Afghan War was the root cause of the Mutiny. It not only antagonised the Hindu sepoy, who found himself virtually excommunicated by his relatives and colleagues, but also the Muslim, who felt unhappy to fight against a co-religionist. Hedayet Ali says that "the Mahomedans always boasted among themselves how they had evaded the English order by never taking aim when they fired."¹

Subedar Hedayet Ali describes the trauma faced by Hindu sepoy who returned from the Afghan War in these words: "None of the Hindoos in Hindoostan would eat with their comrades who went to Afghanistan, nor would they even allow them to touch their cooking utensils; they looked upon them as outcasts, and treated them accordingly." A similar account is given by Sitaram, who served in Afghanistan as a jemadar: "Great fears were felt by the sepoy at the idea of having to go across the Indus.....The sepoy dreaded passing the Indus, because it is out of Hindustan. This is forbidden in our religion: the very act is loss of caste. In consequence of this many sepoy obtained their discharge, and many deserted."²

The enlargement of the Company's dominions in India was accompanied by a corresponding increase in missionary activities. Several missionary schools were established, where students were not only taught basic subjects but also enlightened about the Christian faith. The missionaries believed that Christianity was the only true religion and considered it a sacred duty to convert those who followed other religions. Missionary activity was carried out not only in schools but also in jails, where prisoners were instructed in the Gospel by visiting Indian clergymen. Though the missionaries were not directly supported by the government, the fact that the functionaries of

the Company belonged to the same faith and were frequently seen in their company gave to Indians the impression that both had a common aim – to make them Christians. The impression was reinforced by the introduction of common messing in jails in 1845, doing away with the system of food being cooked separately for each caste. This naturally caused considerable resentment among the higher castes, especially the Brahmins, who lost caste for eating food cooked by others.

Act XXI was enacted in 1850, which permitted converts to inherit ancestral property. Though it was applicable to all religions, in effect it benefitted only converts to Christianity. Hinduism did not permit conversion from other religions and the Muslim convert derived no advantage because Islam forbids inheriting the property of an infidel. The law was, therefore, seen as a measure intended to encourage conversion to Christianity. Hindus found the new law particularly offensive since it gave to those who left the religion rights to the property of their ancestors without the inherent obligations such as lighting the funeral pyre and performing rituals on death anniversaries. The Hindu, therefore, felt that the law inflicted on him a double loss, the loss of a son in his life and the loss of his religious services hereafter.³

In 1855, there was a serious incident at Bolarum near Hyderabad that should have acted as a warning to the British that the sepoy was quite capable of resorting to violence if severely provoked as regards his religion. Not realising that an important Muslim festival, Moharrum, also fell on that day, Brigadier General Colin Mackenzie commanding the Hyderabad Contingent issued an order on 21 September banning processions on 23 September, a Sunday. This enraged the Muslim troopers of the 3rd Cavalry, who felt that the Moharrum procession had been banned. Though the order was withdrawn next day, the damage had been done. On the fateful day, the Muslim troopers took out the procession along the forbidden route that ran past the brigadier's bungalow. Mackenzie, who was then sitting on his lawn with some other officers and ladies, was annoyed when the processions neared his house, accompanied by loud music and lamentations, which are an integral part of the pageant.

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He came out of his house and ordered the men to disperse. When they refused, in a fit of rage he snatched some of the flags they were carrying. The angry men dispersed but shortly afterwards made a murderous attack on Mackenzie who was left for dead but survived. Subsequently, all the Indian officers of 3rd Cavalry except two were dismissed. The Governor General, Lord Dalhousie, opined that Brigadier Mackenzie had acted indiscreetly: "The order was not only unusual, but objectionable in that it put forward the Moharrum in direct confrontation with the Christian Sabbath, and so introduced a religious element into the prohibition." Mackenzie was brought down to the rank of major and transferred to Murshidabad as agent to the governor-general. He eventually retired as a lieutenant general. ⁴

In 1856, Lord Canning arrived in India as governor-general. His predecessor, Lord Dalhousie had approved the draft of the Hindu Widows Remarriage Act, which appeared to be a natural consequence of the abolition of *sati*. The measure to permit widows to marry had been advocated by several Hindu scholars, particularly Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, who argued that it was based on old scriptures. In effect, the practice was already in vogue among the lower castes, and it was only the higher castes such as the Brahmins who despised it. Though the measure was permissive and did not impose any compulsion, it was viewed as yet another attempt to interfere with ancient Hindu customs. So strong were social prejudices at that time that very few widows actually took advantage of the new law, in spite of the efforts of social reformers. ⁵

Another unpopular measure introduced in 1856 concerned the terms of engagement of new recruits to the Bengal Army. Due to caste prejudices, sepoys of the Bengal Army were unwilling to serve overseas, and their terms of service specifically included a clause to this effect. The Madras Army, which had a fair proportion of Brahmins, had no such qualms and were frequently sent abroad, even when the area of operations fell in the jurisdiction of the Bengal Army. Wishing to put an end to this anomaly, Lord Canning decided that future recruitment to the Bengal Army would include a condition for

overseas service. Though the sepoys already serving were not affected, they were alarmed by the new regulation, which would close the door to military service to future generations. The ill timed measure convinced the sepoy that the British had no regard for long service and loyalty, and neither could they be trusted to respect religion and caste. ⁶

The sepoys regarded the changes in the terms of recruitment of the Bengal Army a breach of faith by the British. Later, a British officer who had spent many years with the Bengal Army was to admit: “Almost all the mutinies in India, whether in Bengal or elsewhere, have been more or less produced, or least have had in some sort the initiative, from ourselves. There has usually been some departure from contract, some disregard of the feelings, health or convenience of the native soldiers, when at the same moment the utmost care was lavished on a European regiment; some interference with their pay or rights, or what they supposed to be their right.”⁷

Instances of breaches of promise regarding pay and allowances had caused trouble in the Bengal and Madras Armies in 1843 and 1844. The Indian sepoy had an insular outlook and disliked foreign service. To him, any place far away from home was foreign, and he expected to be compensated financially for the hardships that he had to endure in unfamiliar regions. During the First Afghan War, General Pollock had paid the sepoys a special *batta* (allowance) when they crossed the Indus. In 1843, Sind was annexed and became a part of the British Empire. It was no longer a foreign land and hence *batta* ceased to be admissible. However, the sepoy could not comprehend these legal niceties, since the Indus had still to be crossed. In 1844, the 34th Bengal Infantry and 7th Bengal Cavalry had refused to march to Sind unless the Indus *batta* was paid. Their example was followed by the 69th and 4th Regiments, which refused to cross the Indus unless a special allowance was paid to them. A similar demand by the 64th was conceded by the commander-in-chief, who agreed to grant an increment in pay and certain other benefits such as family pension to the heirs of those who died from disease contracted on service. The commanding officer, Colonel Moseley, persuaded the regiment to cross

the Indus, assuring the men that they would be getting the same *batta* as given to Pollock's sepoys. However, on arrival at Shikarpur they refused their pay when they found that they were to be paid only eight rupees as *batta*, instead of the twelve that they had been promised. (The salary of a sepoy was seven rupees.) It was only on the personal intervention of General George Hunter, whom the men loved and respected, that they finally agreed to receive their pay. Holding the commanding officer responsible for the crisis, Hunter removed him from command. Moseley was tried by court martial and cashiered. Thirty-eight of the mutineers were also tried and sentenced to death. Finally, only six were awarded capital punishment, the sentences of the others being commuted to life imprisonment or hard labour for various terms. Considering that the entire regiment had mutinied, the sentences were regarded as lenient. However, the bond of trust between the British officer and the sepoy had been broken. In 1857, when commanding officers tried to assure the sepoys that there was no animal fat in the grease used with the new cartridges, the men disbelieved them.⁸

Instances of disaffection concerning pay and allowances were not confined to the Bengal Army alone. Towards the end of 1843, the 6th Madras Cavalry was ordered to move from Kamptee to Jubbulpore, which was outside the Madras Presidency. Unlike their colleagues in the Bengal Army who left their families in their villages, troops of the Madras Army kept their families with them. On the assumption that the move to Kamptee was temporary, the troopers of 6th Cavalry left their families behind before moving. On arrival at Jubbulpore they were surprised to learn that their stay at the new station was of a permanent nature and that too at lower allowances than they had expected. They now had to send for their families from Kamptee, incurring considerable expense from their pockets. They also learned that their next move would be to Arcot, 900 miles to the south. Incensed by this apparent breach of faith, for which they held their commanding officer Major Litchfield responsible, the troopers refused to obey his orders. The Brigadier commanding the station paraded the men and took their complaints. Fortunately, approval for paying

higher allowances arrived before the situation got out of hand, and a major crisis was averted.⁹

After the refusal of several regiments of the Bengal Army to serve in Sind, the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Charles Napier sent an urgent appeal to Bombay for help in garrisoning that province. Bombay, being unable to comply with the request, passed it on to Madras, where the Marquis of Tweeddale, holding the double office of governor and commander-in-chief of the Presidency, agreed to send two regiments of Native Infantry. One of these regiments had been earmarked for Burma, where higher allowances were admissible. Being unaware of the regulations of the Bengal Army, the governor assured both regiments that they would be paid allowances in Sind at the same rate that they would have got in Burma. The regiments embarked at Madras for Bombay from where they were to proceed to Karachi. Incensed at the move of the Madras regiments without his approval, the Governor-General, Lord Ellenborough, countermanded the move and ordered that both regiments be disembarked at Bombay. When the men reached Bombay, they were informed that the higher allowances promised to them could not be paid to them. Since they had already drawn their salaries in advance, in order to make provision for their families which were left behind, they found themselves almost penniless in Bombay, with not enough money even for food. The sepoys demanded that they should be given rations, which was refused. The men broke out on parade and refused the orders of their officers. It was only after the general commanding the station intervened that order was restored, and the men agreed to accept an advance of pay. The sepoys were unable to appreciate the inability of the government to pay them the higher allowances. To them it was a clear case of breach of promise made by a person no less than the Governor himself.¹⁰

Instances of refusal of pay continued to occur in 1849, especially in the Punjab. In July 1849 the 13th and 22nd Regiments of the Bengal Infantry at Rawalpindi refused their pay. The Commander-in-Chief, Sir Charles Napier, received reports that the four regiments at Wazirabad and two at Jhelum

were likely to follow their example. Napier hurried from Calcutta to Simla, where the Governor General, Lord Dalhousie had moved to escape the heat of the plains. There were signs of the disaffection spreading to the whole of the Punjab if it was not curbed immediately. After consulting Dalhousie, Napier decided to tour the affected areas himself. The sepoys at Rawalpindi and Wazirabad had been pacified by Colin Campbell and John Hearsey, who were destined to play even greater roles in 1857. But Napier knew that the trouble was far from over and made preparations to crush a general uprising if it occurred by using European troops. His fears were confirmed when the 66th Regiment at Govindgarh broke out into open mutiny. Fortunately, the 1st Native Cavalry was unaffected and with their help the mutiny was suppressed. The 66th Regiment was ordered to be disbanded and struck from the Army List.

Though the disaffection appeared to have been smothered, Napier felt that the sepoy had a genuine grievance that needed to be resolved. In 1844, Lord Ellenborough had approved the grant of compensation to troops when the cost of items of daily rations such as flour increased above a certain figure. His successor, Lord Hardinge had issued new regulations in 1845 which effectively reduced the amount of compensation. Napier felt that this was unfair and pending receipt of formal approval from the governor-general, issued orders in January 1850 that the sepoys be paid the higher rate as given in the 1844 regulations. Dalhousie was then not in India, but on his return in May 1850, took strong exception to the action of the commander-in-chief. He did not agree with Napier's view that "a mutinous spirit pervaded in the army in the Punjab, and thatthe Government of the country was placed in a position of 'great peril'. Dalhousie went on to record: "the safety of India has never for one moment been imperiled by the partial insubordination in the ranks of its army." ¹¹

The confrontation between Dalhousie and Napier ended with the resignation of the latter. Though Dalhousie was right in asserting that Napier had exceeded his authority in issuing the orders granting higher allowances

to the sepoy, there were many who felt that the governor-general should have supported his commander-in-chief, whose fears about disaffection among the sepoys were genuine, as was emphatically proved just seven years afterwards. To the sepoy, Napier's resignation and the cancellation of his orders granting him higher allowances was another proof, if any was needed, that even the highest in the land could not be trusted, and the Company only wanted to use his services to extend its dominions, with least concern for his welfare.

Between 1852 and 1856, the war in Crimea severely strained the resources of Britain, forcing her to reduce the number of British troops in India by almost 3,000. The majority of the available British regiments were concentrated in the Punjab, which had recently been annexed, denuding the rest of the country. As a result, the number of European troops available at most of the cantonments in the rest of the country was small. This proved to be a costly lapse when the mutiny broke out in 1857. Another fallout of the Crimean War was the manner in which it changed the impression about the British in the minds of the Indian public. Heavy losses in Crimea dealt a severe blow to the image of the English, and a proposal in the British Parliament to send troops from India to Crimea was dropped when it was realised that the measure would reveal to the subject race the weakness of the rulers. The Patriotic Fund, established in England to raise subscriptions for the Crimean War served to reinforce the impression among intelligent Indians that the British were as short of money as they were of men.¹²

Along with social and economic reforms the British rulers introduced a legal system that treated all native subjects as equals, without regard to caste or rank. While the measure could be lauded as being fair and just, it did not take into account the age old caste equations in India and the privileged position enjoyed by persons ranking high in the feudal order. A well-born noble found that he could be summoned to the court of a magistrate like any common criminal, even on a minor complaint by a money lender or a petty shopkeeper. A situation such as this never occurred in a native kingdom, where caste and rank were always respected, even while dispensing justice.

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The British legal system was resented by all Indians, especially those of high rank and caste. It was unpopular even with the poor peasants, due to the complexities of the English legal procedure and rampant corruption in the lower judiciary.¹³

Perhaps the most unpopular law enacted by the British was the one that allowed the sale of land of a cultivator for failure to pay the rent. Traditionally, land rights in India were inalienable. A cultivator or debtor was usually imprisoned or held in bondage until his relatives paid off his dues to secure his release. The rent was usually paid in kind, the common method of recovery being a division of the standing crop before it was harvested. The system was complicated and time consuming, and with a view to simplify matters the Company decided to replace it with the new system of sale of land in cases of default. The system had its advantages and would have worked if the rents were fair and reasonable. However, not only were the rents fixed by the Company very high, there were no safeguards for bad harvests when the rains failed, a common occurrence in India. This led to many *zamindars* (land owners) losing land held by their families for several generations, and feudal overlords being turned into pensioners overnight. Since the land in question was usually bought by a money lender or *bania* (merchant), this led to a severe upheaval in the social order. More than any other class, the *zamindars* who had been dispossessed of their lands nursed the greatest grudge against the Company's rule, and waited for an opportunity to avenge the injustice and humiliation heaped on them.¹⁴

The social reforms and changes in the legal system affected the people living in dominions under British rule, with the princely states remaining virtually unaffected. However, this was not to last long. As the power of the British grew, so did their appetite for territory. If a princely state could be annexed by force of arms, this was done. If not, subterfuge was resorted to, a classic example of the latter being Dalhousie's infamous doctrine of lapse. The state of Punjab was annexed in 1849, though the ruler was a minor and, in fact, a ward of the British. Yet he was blamed for the Multan rising,

leading to the Second Sikh War. Satara was annexed in 1850, after the death of the ruler without a male heir, though he had adopted one on his death bed, in accordance with the prevalent custom. In 1853, Nagpur and Jhansi were annexed for the same reason. The widows of the rulers of Satara and Jhansi sent emissaries to London to plead their case, without success. Both were to play an important role in the 1857 uprising, Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi being immortalised for her courage and fortitude in fighting the British. The annexation of Carnatic and Tanjore followed, even though the rulers had always been loyal to the Company. These measures not only alienated public opinion in India but were widely criticised in Britain. However, by far the most shocking example of British duplicity was the annexation of Oudh.¹⁵

In 1856, Wajid Ali Shah, the king of Oudh was deposed and his kingdom made part of the British Empire. Unlike others Indian states that had been annexed under the doctrine of lapse for want of a male heir, Oudh was amalgamated with the Company's dominions on grounds of maladministration, a charge that found few takers even among the British. The rulers of Oudh had always been faithful allies of the British and the measure shocked everyone. The administration of Oudh under the king was not of the best, but this could be said of most princely states. In 1853, there was a mutiny over arrears of pay in a regiment of the king of Oudh's service at Faizabad under the command of Captain Barlow, who reportedly spent more time at the races in Cawnpore than in his regiment. Colonel W.H. Sleeman, the resident in Lucknow was one of the severest critics of the policy of annexation. With rare prescience, he wrote: "The native states I consider to be breakwaters, and, when they are all swept away, we shall be left to the mercy of our native army, which may not be always sufficiently under our control." After the mutiny in Barlow's regiment, he recommended that the British should assume the administration as trustees of the Oudh royal family, and spend the entire revenue on the benefit of the people. In 1854, Sleeman had to go on leave to Britain due to ill health and died during the voyage. Lord Dalhousie forwarded Sleeman's proposal to the Court of

Directors in London, but did not recommend annexation. However, he received instructions that Oudh should be annexed. Dalhousie complied, and it is difficult to miss the touch of glee and avarice in the entry in his diary: "So our gracious Queen had five million more subjects and 1,300,000 pounds more revenues than she had yesterday."¹⁶

The annexation of Oudh caused widespread anger among the local population as well as the sepoys. Oudh contributed the largest number of soldiers – almost two-thirds - to the Bengal Army, with a fair number joining the armies of the other two presidencies. The Oudh sepoys, numbering about 60,000, enjoyed a privileged position by virtue of the system that permitted them to address petitions for legal redress through the British resident in Lucknow, to the envy of others who were not in the Company's service. After the annexation of Oudh the resident was replaced by a chief commissioner, and the entire population became subjects of the Company. The Oudh soldiers ceased to enjoy the special privileges they had become accustomed to and their petitions no longer received the attention they had earlier taken for granted. The Oudh sepoy naturally blamed the British for the deprivation of this right, and this had an adverse effect on his devotion and allegiance. Another unfortunate sequel of the annexation of Oudh was the disbandment of the royal army of Oudh and of the armed guards of the Oudh *talugdars* (nobles). About 15,000 of the discharged men were absorbed in the newly raised Oudh irregular force and the military police, but the remainder had to be discharged. This created a large body of disgruntled soldiers, of which many remained in Lucknow, with the others carrying their resentment to their villages. These erstwhile soldiers formed the backbone of the mobs that rampaged through Oudh when the mutiny broke out a year later, the immediate cause being the greased cartridge. .

The Enfield rifle having proved its worth in Crimea, in 1856, it was decided to introduce it in India to replace the old-fashioned musket. To train sepoys in the use of the new weapon, depots were established at Dum Dum, Ambala and Sialkot. Cartridges for the rifle were manufactured at Fort William

in Calcutta and supplied to the depots. The suspicion that the cartridges contained the fat of cows and pigs first came to light after a brief conversation between a Brahmin sepoy of the 2nd Regiment, Native (Grenadier) Infantry and a low caste *khalasi* (labourer) attached to the magazine at Dum Dum. The *khalasi* asked the sepoy for some water from his *lota* (vessel for carrying water), which the latter refused, since he was not aware of the caste of the *khalasi*. The labourer replied: “You will soon lose your caste, as before long you will have to bite cartridges covered with the fat of cows and pigs.” The news spread like wildfire and soon came to the notice of Captain Wright, an artillery officer attached to the Rifle Instruction Depot at Dum Dum. Wright immediately brought this to the notice of the Major J. Bontein, commanding the Dum Dum Musketry Depot, as well as Major General John Hearsey, commanding the Presidency Division.

The next day, Bontein also sent a report to General Hearsey. On receipt of the letter from Captain Wright, Bontein had paraded all the sepoys and asked if any of them had a complaint. “At least two thirds of the detachment immediately stepped to the front, including all the native commissioned officers. In a manner perfectly respectful they very distinctly stated their objections to the present method of preparing cartridges for the new rifled musket. The mixture employed for greasing cartridges was opposed to their religious feeling, and as a remedy they begged to suggest the employment of wax and oil in such proportions as, in their opinion, would answer the purpose required.” Acting with alacrity, General Hearsey forwarded the reports of Wright and Bontein to the government on 24 January, recommending that the sepoys be permitted to purchase the ingredients required to make the grease themselves from the market. Approval of the government was received within four days.¹⁷

However, news of the affair had reached other stations, thanks to the *Dharma Sabha*, a religious organisation in Calcutta, which propagated the view that it was the intention of the government to convert all soldiers to Christianity by force. One of the stations affected was Barrackpore, situated

16 miles from Calcutta on the banks of the Hoogly, where the headquarters of the Presidency Division was located. The station had four native regiments – the 2nd Grenadiers, the 34th and 70th Bengal Infantry and the 43rd Light Cavalry. The station commander was Brigadier Charles Grant, with General Hearsey in command of the division. Soon after the Dum Dum incident, a company of the 34th arrived at Berhampore, near Murshidabad, where the 19th Bengal Infantry was located, bringing tales of the greased cartridge. On 26 February, Lieutenant Colonel M.W Mitchell, commanding the 19th regiment, ordered that a parade would be held next morning for a firing exercise using blank ammunition. When the percussion caps for the morning parade were issued on 26 February, the men refused to accept them, fearing that they would have to use the cartridges during the parade. Mitchell called in the 11th Irregular Cavalry and threatened the 19th that he would send them to Burma or China. The regiment then dispersed, and the Cavalry was withdrawn. It was decided that the regiment would be marched to Barrackpore, where it would be disbanded in the presence of European troops. A steamer was promptly despatched to Rangoon to fetch the king's 84th Regiment, which was sent to Chinsura near Barrackpore when it disembarked. The 19th was then ordered to march to Barrackpore, where it arrived on 30 March. En route, they were met by some emissaries from the 34th who asked them to join hands and kill their officers. However, the 19th refused, professing their loyalty and willingness to serve anywhere, as long as their religion was not interfered with. Keith Young, the judge advocate general, was of the opinion that in view of the repentant attitude and good behaviour of the unit, it should be given the option of volunteering for service in China or Persia instead of being disbanded. But the governor-general did not agree, opining that in the interest of discipline, an act of mutiny could not be condoned. On 31 March 1857, the 19th Bengal Infantry was disbanded with due ceremony, in the presence of the 84th Foot, a wing of the 53rd, two batteries of European Artillery, the Governor General's Bodyguard and the Native Brigade. After the disbandment, General Hearsey addressed the

men, announcing that as a reward for their penitence and good conduct, they would be permitted to retain their uniforms and paid the cost of conveyance to their homes. Touched by the kindness shown to them, many of them broke down, saying that they had been misled by the sepoys of the 34th, against whom they vowed vengeance.¹⁸

Two days before the disbandment of the 19th, the most serious incident – the first attack on a British officer - had already occurred at Barrackpore. On 29 March, Mangal Pandey, a young sepoy on quarter guard duty in the 34th Bengal Infantry ran amuck, probably under the influence of *bhang* (intoxicant). He first fired at the Sergeant Major, and then at the Adjutant, Lieutenant Baugh, who came to the scene hearing of the attack. After Baugh's horse was shot under him, he approached the mutinous sepoy with his drawn sword, with the Sergeant Major at his side. However, Mangal Pandey proved to be more than a match for them and wounded both Baugh and the Sergeant Major, who were saved from certain death by a Muslim sepoy who rushed to their aid, holding Mangal Pandey until they escaped. The other sepoys of the quarter guard did not intervene and Mangal Pandey continued to rant with a rifle in his hands.

Meanwhile, news of the incident reached General Hearsey who got the impression that the entire brigade had mutinied. Without wasting a moment, Hearsey rode to the parade ground accompanied by his two sons and Major Ross, one his staff officers. Ordering the guard to follow him, General Hearsey and the three officers rode towards Mangal Pandey who shouted to the other sepoys to join him. Seeing that none of the sepoys was ready to come to his aid, Mangal Pandey turned his rifle on himself and fired. However, his wound was superficial and he was immediately taken into custody. He was later tried by a court martial consisting of 14 native officers who unanimously found him guilty, 11 of them voting for the death sentence. On 8 April, Mangal Pandey was hanged in Barrackpore, in the presence of all the native troops. A few days later, Jemadar Isuri Pandey, who had prevented the other sepoys of the guard from coming to the aid of the sergeant major and the adjutant, was

also hanged. On 6 May, seven companies of the 34th Bengal Infantry that were present at Barrackpore during the mutiny were disbanded, after being stripped of their uniforms. (Three companies of the regiment, stationed at Chittagong, which had disassociated themselves from the actions of Mangal Pandey and professed their loyalty, escaped disbandment). This seemed to end the trouble caused by the greased cartridges. Two days after the disbandment of the 34th, General Hearsey reported that he had asked European troops to return to their barracks, since he did not think they would be needed again. Lord Canning was about to order the 84th back to Rangoon, when news came of the outbreak of the mutiny at Meerut.¹⁹

The official date of the start of the Sepoy Mutiny is taken as 10 May 1857, when the 3rd Cavalry broke out into open mutiny at Meerut. Though a similar incident had occurred at Lucknow a week earlier, it was nipped in the bud. On 2 May, a battalion of the Oudh Irregular Infantry at Lucknow refused the new cartridges. The following day, Henry Lawrence discreetly disarmed them. In order to prevent the disaffection from spreading and restore confidence among the men, he discharged a few of the ring leaders, announced some promotions and then rearmed about 200 personnel. Had similar discretion been displayed by Colonel Carmichael Smyth at Meerut, or either Major General William Hewett or Brigadier Archdale Wilson acted with alacrity and pursued the troopers of 3rd Cavalry who left for Delhi, the mutiny might never have taken place. John Lawrence was later to remark: "I do assure you that some of our commanders are worse enemies than the mutineers themselves."²⁰

Meerut was then one of the largest cantonments in India, with a large complement of European and Native troops. The European complement comprised the 1st Battalion of Her Majesty's 60th Rifles; the 6th Dragoon Guards (Carabiners); a troop of Horse Artillery; a company of Foot Artillery and a light field battery. The three native corps were the 3rd Light Cavalry, the 11th and the 20th Bengal Infantry. Reports of the events at Dum Dum and Barrackpore had reached Meerut and caused considerable excitement

among the sepoys. Apart from the greased cartridges, it was rumoured that the government was attempting to destroy the religion of the people by mixing ground bones in the flour being sold in the bazaars. The disaffection among the sepoys was palpable, and there were instances of the men not saluting their officers and some bungalows being burnt. It was in the midst of this unsettled state that on 23 April, Lieutenant Colonel Carmichael Smyth, commanding the 3rd Light Cavalry, ordered a parade of 90 skirmishers to be held next morning in order to explain to the men the new mode by which they might load their carbines without biting the cartridges.

During the evening some of the officers came to know that the men would refuse the cartridges next day. The adjutant informed the commanding officer and advised him to cancel the parade, but Colonel Smyth refused. The parade was held on 24 April as ordered. Out of 90 troopers, 85 refused the cartridges, even after the Commanding Officer spoke to them. The parade was dismissed and the matter reported to Major General Hewett, commanding the Meerut Division. Hewett did not approve of Carmichael Smyth's ill-advised decision to hold the parade, but could not avoid ordering a court an inquiry. The proceedings of the inquiry were submitted to the Commander-in-Chief, General George Anson, who ordered the mutinous soldiers to be tried by a native general court martial. By the votes of 14 out of the 15 native officers forming the court, all 85 were convicted and sentenced to ten years hard labour.²¹

On 9 May 1857, a parade was held in Meerut to announce the sentences awarded to the 85 troopers of the 3rd Light Cavalry. After announcing the sentence of ten years rigorous imprisonment, the men were stripped and put in fetters, in front of the entire garrison. Under a burning sun, the men of the three native regiments - 3rd Light Cavalry, 11th and 20th Native Infantry – watched in sullen silence as blacksmiths put leg irons on the ankles of each prisoner. The men being shackled implored the Divisional Commander, Major General Hewitt, to have mercy, and when this failed, loudly called upon their comrades to come to their aid, heaping insults on their Commanding Officer,

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Colonel Carmichael Smyth, whose folly in holding the parade in April had triggered the crisis. To deter any untoward incident, two British regiments – 60th Rifles and 6th Dragoon Guards – had been placed behind the native troops, in addition to some artillery guns. After the parade, the prisoners were sent to jail, the troops being marched back to their lines. The British officers went back to their bungalows, remarking on the salutary effect the punishment must have had on the natives. As they went to bed that Saturday night, nothing was farther from their minds than a mutiny, in which most of them were to lose their lives.

The mutiny started in the evening on 10 May, when members of the British community were getting ready to go to evening church service. As the 60th Rifles was assembling for the church parade, a cry was raised that the British soldiers were intending to descend on the Indian troops, disarm and put them in chains. This caused a panic, precipitating the outbreak. Some Indian troopers galloped to the jail and released their comrades who had been imprisoned the previous day. The whole of the 3rd Cavalry then joined the soldiers of the two native infantry regiments who had assembled on the parade ground. Lieutenant Colonel Finnis, commanding the 11th Native Infantry, rode to the parade ground as soon as he heard about the outbreak. He harangued the men, and asked them to return to their duty. His own men had been the last and most hesitant of the rebels; Finnis was confident that his men loved him and would listen to him. But the men of the 20th had no such compunctions. They fired a volley and Colonel Finnis fell, riddled with bullets. He was the first victim of the Great Indian Mutiny.²²

The soldiers were soon joined by a mob of civilians from the *bazaar* (market) who proceeded to murder Europeans and set fire to their houses. Though the troopers of 3rd Cavalry started the mutiny, they did not harm any of their officers. When they set free their colleagues from the jail, they did not release the other prisoners, who were later set free by the mob from the town. They also did not harm the British jailor. In fact, many of the British officers and their families escaped death only because of the help given by Indian

soldiers and servants, some of whom risked their lives for this. Soon after the outbreak of the mutiny, the bulk of 3rd Cavalry, mainly Muslim, made off for Delhi to meet the Emperor, Bahadur Shah II. Surprisingly, no effort was made to stop or intercept the troopers who rode towards Delhi, and neither was any attempt made at pursuit. Meerut had more European troops than most stations in India, who could easily have quelled the mutiny. Overwhelmed by events, the 70-year-old General Hewett seemed to be gripped by mental paralysis, leaving everything in the hands of Brigadier Archdale Wilson, who commanded the station. Unfortunately, Wilson proved unequal to the task and after a fruitless search of the native lines, ordered the European brigade to retire to the cantonment for the night. A resolute commander would have sent the dragoons in pursuit of the mutineers leaving only some infantry and artillery to defend the cantonment. If they had reached Delhi even a few hours after the mutineers, the city could have been saved and the mutiny suppressed. As historians were later to record, far fewer men held the Residency at Lucknow against disciplined troops for many months. Fifty years earlier, Gillespie had crushed the mutiny at Vellore and saved the Southern Peninsula from universal revolt with a regiment of dragoons and some galloper guns.²³

After the outbreak on 19 May, an eerie silence descended on Meerut. Almost all the native troops had left, some for Delhi and the rest for their homes. The British garrison continued to stay in their barracks, with the women, children and unarmed civilians taking shelter in a walled enclosure called the *Dumdama*. The calm lasted five days, until some Bengal Sappers and Miners from Roorkee arrived on a routine tour of duty on 15 May. When orders were given for the unit magazine to be taken away from them, the sappers panicked, one of them shooting their commanding officer. Gripped by fear of reprisal, the mutineers fled, about fifty taking shelter in a grove, where they were destroyed by the artillery.

The rebels from Meerut reached Delhi on 11 May and made their way to the Red Fort, where they appealed to Emperor Bahadur Shah to assume

command, placing their services at his disposal. Pleading poverty – he was a king only in name, subsisting on a pension from the Company – Bahadur Shah vacillated, but ultimately agreed, after having sent a camel-borne messenger to Agra to inform John Russell Colvin, the lieutenant governor of the Northwestern Provinces. The Meerut troopers were joined by the sepoys of the 38th Native Infantry, which had lately refused to go to Burma. Since there were no European troops in Delhi, they had the entire city at their mercy. What followed was an orgy of violence, with several Europeans, including women and children being killed. Delhi was to remain in the hands of the rebels until 20 September, when it was finally recaptured by British forces under Nicholson, who died at its gates. Bahadur Shah's life was spared, but he was banished to Rangoon. Three of the princes were shot in cold blood, the remaining 21 being hanged.²⁴

Situated on the banks of the River Ganges, Cawnpore was an important military station that commanded the Grand Trunk road and the one to Lucknow, the capital of Oudh. It had a strong garrison, comprising a European Artillery battery of six guns, three native infantry regiments – the 1st, 53rd and 56th – and the 2nd Light Cavalry. The commander was Major General Sir Hugh Wheeler, a distinguished soldier with over 50 years of service. News of the events at Meerut and Delhi reached Cawnpore on 14 May, but did not cause much alarm. The garrison was strengthened on 22 May by a contingent of 55 Europeans and 240 troopers of the Oudh Irregular Cavalry from Lucknow. Since their presence created some uneasiness Wheeler sent them back on 30 May. Responding to a call from Lucknow when open mutiny broke out there, and assured of reinforcements from Calcutta, Wheeler sent two officers and fifty men to Lucknow on 3 June, depleting his own strength. By this time the situation had become tense after a cashiered officer who was drunk fired on a patrol of 2nd Cavalry on 2 June. He was tried the next day but acquitted on the grounds that he was not in his senses. Fearing the worst, Wheeler ordered all non-combatants to go into an entrenchment, where a month's

provisions and one lakh rupees were also moved. This was the signal for the mutiny, which broke out on 4 June.

The 2nd Cavalry led the mutiny, being joined by the 1st Regiment. After waiting for a day, the 56th also joined but the 53rd remained firm until they were fired upon by the artillery, under Wheeler's orders. After looting the treasury and freeing the prisoners from the jail, the mutineers decided to march to Delhi, but were persuaded to return by emissaries of the Nana Sahib, the ruler of Bithur, the seat of the exiled Peshwas near Cawnpore. After a siege lasting 22 days, during which the women and children suffered the most, Wheeler agreed to evacuate the entrenchment, in return for a promise of safe passage for all Europeans by the Nana Sahib. On 27 June, the garrisons surrendered, and were escorted to the Sati Chaura Ghat on the Ganges, where boats had been provided. As soon as the Europeans had got into the boats, the boatmen jumped in the river and the mutineers opened fire with muskets and cannon that had been placed on the banks, hidden from view. Most of the party were killed by fire or drowned when they jumped into the water to save their lives. The few boats that got away were followed by musket fire till nightfall. The survivors were captured and sent back to Cawnpore where the men were shot, under orders of the Nana. Only four men who had boarded the boats escaped, being given shelter by a local chieftain who escorted them to a detachment that was going from Allahabad to join Havelock's force. At Cawnpore, five men and 206 European women had been confined in the infamous Bibighar on 1 July. Shortly before Havelock entered the city on 17 July, the occupants of the Bibighar were put to death, and their bodies thrown into a well. ²⁵

While the garrison at Cawnpore was under siege, Neill was busy hanging innocent natives at Benares and Allahabad. In fact, Neill's atrocities were the main reason for the massacres at Sati Chaura and the Bibighar. Lord Canning had summoned Colonel J.G. Neill from Madras as soon as news of the mutiny at Meerut reached him, and despatched him to reinforce Cawnpore and Lucknow as soon as he reached Calcutta. Arriving at Benares on 3 June, he

decided to disarm the 37th Native Infantry, though Brigadier Ponsonby, who was in command, saw no sign of disaffection in the Regiment. At a parade the same evening, the 37th obediently surrendered their arms, when suddenly European troops appeared on the scene, with cartridges and grapeshot. Thinking that they were going to be killed by the European soldiers as had happened in the Punjab, the sepoys panicked and made a rush for their arms. The Europeans immediately opened fire, and in the confusion, Sikhs and Irregulars also started firing. Neill took over command from Ponsonby and proceeded to hunt down the rebels and suspects among the local population, “hanging them up with as little compunction as though they had been pariah dogs or jackals or vermin of a baser kind.”²⁶

The news from Benares reached Allahabad the next day, causing the 6th Native Infantry under Colonel Simpson to mutiny. However, 80 men from the regiment and about 400 Sikhs who were inside the fort, remained steady under Captain Brasyer. After killing their officers the mutineers proceeded to plunder and burn the homes of Christians, many of whom were killed. After the looting and killing, most of the sepoys went away to their homes, never to be seen again. On 11 June, Neill arrived at Allahabad and entered the fort. However, instead of hurrying to Cawnpore to relieve the beleaguered garrison under Wheeler, he proceeded to punish and terrorise the local population. Punitive expeditions sent by land and by river burned villages and hanged persons of all shades on the least suspicion of complicity or sympathy with the mutineers. These atrocities continued unabated until 30 June when Havelock arrived at Allahabad and took over command. The news of Wheeler’s capitulation at Cawnpore reached him soon afterwards.²⁷

At Lucknow, Henry Lawrence’s timely action had contained the disaffection in the Oudh Irregular Infantry after it refused the cartridges, but things were far from quiet. Lucknow then had only one British regiment – the 32nd – against four Native regiments - the 13th, 48th and 71st Native Infantry and the 7th Cavalry. As soon as Lawrence came to know of the disasters at Meerut and Lucknow, he asked the governor-general for plenary powers in

Oudh. He was immediately promoted to brigadier rank and became the head of the army as well as the civil administration. As a precautionary measure, he moved the women and children into the Residency and the Machhi Bhawan, which were organised for defence. The mutiny broke out on 30 May, but was subdued, with the help of the loyal elements of the 13th and 71st who joined the British regiment. Some of the arrested mutineers were tried next day and hanged while the rest marched to Delhi. Lawrence shifted his headquarters into the Residency, which he began to fortify against an attack from the rebels that he knew was inevitable. After General Wheeler's capitulation at Cawnpore the rebel force made its way towards Lucknow.

Deciding to give battle before the rebels reached the city, Lawrence met them at Chinhut on 30 June but was defeated due to the defection of the Oudh gunners and the timidity of the native cavalry. The 32nd Regiment suffered heavy casualties, with three British officers and 116 men killed in the days fighting. The remnants retired to the Residency along with about 500 sepoys, who remained with them throughout the famous siege. Tragedy struck the garrison when Lawrence was mortally wounded and breathed his last on 4 July. The garrison now came under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John Inglis. Since the telegraph wires had been cut, they had to rely on messengers to communicate with the relieving forces, many of them being caught and put to death. The garrison was constantly under attack by the besieging force of sepoys, and there was considerable loss of life not only from enemy fire but also disease and starvation. On 25 September, a force under Brigadier General Havelock and Sir James Outram fought its way into the Residency. During the 87 days the siege lasted, the strength of the garrison had fallen from 1692 to 982, which included many sick and wounded.²⁸

The garrison in the Residency was reinforced, but the siege continued. On 7 November a messenger arrived with the welcome news that a strong army led by the commander-in-chief himself was expected to reach Lucknow in the next few days. On 12 November, Sir Colin Campbell reached Alam Bagh, just south of Lucknow. A semaphore telegraph was established between

Alam Bagh and the Residency to exchange messages. Lucknow was relieved on 17 November but subsequently evacuated. Leaving a small force under Outram at Alam Bagh, the commander-in-chief returned to Cawnpore and established his headquarters there. Preparations began for the reduction of Oudh, and the capture of Lucknow. By the end of February 1858, the army had concentrated at Alam Bagh, and operations against Lucknow commenced on 2 March. The capture of the city by British forces on 22 March was followed by destruction and pillage on an unprecedented scale. In spite of most of the captured booty being misappropriated, the booty collected by the prize agents was worth a million and a quarter sterling.²⁹

After the mutiny at Lucknow, the disaffection soon spread to neighbouring stations. On 4 June, the 41st Native Infantry at Sitapur shot their commanding officer and several others. The 9th and 10th Irregular Cavalry soon joined the 41st after shooting their officers. With the help of some loyal elements a few officers and their families were able to reach Lucknow, but the majority, including the Commissioner, J.G Christian, and his family were killed. At Azamgarh, the 17th Native Infantry looted the treasury on 3 June, and marched towards Oudh. The troops at Benares followed their example on 4 June, and the two groups of mutineers proceeded to Faizabad, where the garrison comprised a horse battery of Native artillery, the 22nd Native Infantry, the 6th Oudh Irregular Infantry and a squadron of the 15th Irregular Cavalry. Influenced by the mutineers from Azamgarh and Benares, the Faizabad garrison also rose. The troopers of the 15th Cavalry tried to induce the others to murder their British officers, but the infantry sepoys refused; they not only arranged for boats to allow the Europeans to get away, but also gave them some money from the treasury. Unfortunately, a number of them were attacked as they made their way down the river Gagra. Many were saved by local chieftains such as Raja Man Singh of Shahganj, who was in British custody for a revenue default, but was released at the instance of Captain Alexander Orr, the assistant commissioner at Faizabad.³⁰

Though the major events connected with the mutiny of 1857 occurred in Oudh, several other military stations held by the Bengal Army were affected in varying degrees. At Hoti Maidan, the 55th Native Infantry fled when they were to be disarmed, leading to the commanding officer taking his own life. The regiment was pursued, 120 sepoys being killed and 150 captured, 40 of the latter being blown from guns. Nearly 500 escaped, but many were caught by the tribesmen and sold as slaves. The 124 who later surrendered were executed. At Gwalior the Subsidiary Force killed several British officers, non commissioned officers and a few women and children on 14 June. The Gwalior contingent later joined Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi, and took part in several engagements with British forces under Tantia Tope. The trouble soon spread to Indore, where the Holkar's troops attacked the Residency on 1 July. The 23rd Native Infantry and the wing of 1st Cavalry at Mhow joined the Holkar's forces, after killing their officers. At Nasirabad, the 15th and 30th Native Infantry mutinied on 28 May, but the 1st Bombay Lancers did not join. However, the officers were not harmed and fled to Beawar. The mutineers made their way to Delhi where they later took part in the defence of the city against the attack by British forces. The Neemuch Brigade comprised the 72nd Native Infantry, the 7th Regiment of the Gwalior Contingent and a wing of the 1st Bengal Cavalry. When the troops rose on 3 June and left for Delhi, the officers fled to Udaipur. The Neemuch Brigade took part in the siege of Delhi, until it was defeated at Najafgarh on 25 August by Nicholson.³¹

The news of the mutiny reached Lahore, on 12 May 1857. Sir John Lawrence, the chief commissioner of Punjab was then at Rawalpindi, en route to the Murree Hills, to join his family. The senior civil officer present in Lahore was Robert Montgomery, the judicial commissioner. Receiving information from a spy that the sepoys at Lahore were about to rise, Montgomery rushed to the cantonment at Mian Mir and proposed to Brigadier Stuart Corbett, the commander of the Lahore garrison, that he should disarm the four native regiments at Lahore - the 16th Grenadiers, the 26th Native Infantry, the 49th Native Infantry and the 8th Light Cavalry. The European troops comprised

the 81st Foot and some European horse artillery. The 2,500 Indian soldiers outnumbered the 600 Europeans more than four times. Early on the morning of 13 May, the four native regiments were paraded and disarmed in the presence of the European horse artillery and six companies of the 81st Foot. It was later discovered that the disarmed regiments were planning to march that night to Ferozepore and seize the magazine.³²

At Multan two regiments of native infantry were disarmed by a horse artillery troop, which was then itself disarmed. Due to paucity of British troops, it was decided that the disarmed sepoys should be sent home in small batches. Alarmed by a rumour that they would be massacred en route, the sepoys attacked the British and Sikh troops on 31 August, killing some officers and men. At Peshawar, the 51st Native Infantry was disarmed on 22 May, after which many deserted. The local tribesmen were offered rewards to apprehend the deserters, and many were rounded up. On 29 May, the subedar major and 12 sepoys were hanged. A few months later, after information was received that the sepoys were secretly buying arms, they were searched. They ran towards a field where the concealed arms were found. They were fired upon by the newly raised 18th Punjab Infantry, 50 falling at the first volley and many being bayoneted in the lines. Out of a total strength of 870 only 70 survived.³³

Ferozepur had three native regiments – the 45th and 57th Infantry and the 10th Cavalry. The British element comprised the 61st Foot, a light field battery and two companies of foot artillery. Brigadier Innes, who had taken charge of the station just two days earlier, decided to disarm the native infantry, overruling the commanding officers. As they were being marched to the parade ground, the 45th discovered the presence of European troops, and about 200 men ran away. The 57th gave up their arms, but the rest of 47th left the station, with the exception of 130 men. They were pursued and scattered, some finding their way to Patiala, where the ruler put them in prison, some being caught by villagers, and others joining the rebels at Delhi. The 10th Cavalry remained loyal and did not join the mutiny. At Jullunder the 36th and the 61st Native Infantry came to know that they were to be

disarmed and mutinied on 7 June, marching to Ludhiana and thence to Delhi. The 41st Native Infantry at Kangra remained orderly and gave up their arms willingly.³⁴

Like Oudh, the province of Bihar provided a large number of recruits for the Bengal Army. At the cantonment at Danapur near Patna were stationed three native infantry regiments – the 7th, 8th and 40th - in addition to a company of native artillery. The British element comprised the 10th Foot and a company of European artillery. News of the incident at Benares reached Danapur on 7 June, causing considerable excitement among the sepoys. Major General Lloyd, commanding the Danapur Division, did not consider it prudent to disarm them, and preferred to wait for the commotion to die down. However, William Tayler, the commissioner, felt that strong measures were needed to reassure the large number of European planters, whose families had moved to Patna. Distrusting the native sepoys, Tayler summoned the Rattray's Sikhs to Patna for the protection of the Europeans who had taken shelter in his house, which was converted into a stronghold. On 12 June, a Muslim of the Wahabi sect found spreading sedition among the Rattray's Sikhs was arrested, tried and hanged. Tayler then called the leaders of the Wahabi community for a meeting, at the end of which three were detained. Tayler then issued a proclamation demanding the surrender of weapons held by the citizens within 24 hours and imposed a curfew at night. These measures could not be enforced, and provoked a riot in the city on 3 July, during which Dr. Lyell, assistant to the Opium Agent was killed. After arresting 43 of the rioters, Tayler ordered them to be tried by a commission comprising himself and the magistrate of Patna. After a quick trial, 19 were hanged, three acquitted and the rest sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. Subsequently, the sentences of 19 of the 21 survivors were overturned by a superior court. The punishments, which were unjust, only increased the disaffection among the people. Lord Canning was later to record: "I believe that in the course of Mr. Tayler's proceedings, men were condemned and executed upon insufficient evidence."³⁵

General Lloyd was still not in favour of disarming the sepoy. On 15 July, instructions came from Calcutta that if he felt it necessary to disarm the sepoy in the presence of European troops, he could disembark the Fifth Fusiliers who were on their way to Benares. These instructions leaked out and soon became known to everyone, including the sepoy. Still not willing to disarm the sepoy, on 24 July Lloyd decided to take away their percussion caps, reasoning that this would prevent them from using their weapons without humiliating them. The regiments were paraded and the percussion caps kept in the stores were collected and loaded in bullock carts. As these carts were returning they were detected by the men of the 7th and 8th Native Infantry who raised an alarm and tried to stop the carts. However, the officers were able to restore order and the carts were allowed to pass. But each sepoy still had 15 caps that he carried on his person. The task of collecting these was assigned to native officers. The men refused to surrender the caps, even when asked by the officers. Matters escalated when some soldiers of the 10th Foot, joined by patients from the European hospital, fired on the sepoy. The 40th Native Infantry did not at first join the mutiny, but when fired upon by the men of the 10th Foot, they went off and joined the mutineers.³⁶

The mutineers proceeded to Arrah, where they joined the forces of Raja Kunwar Singh, of Shahabad. Then over 80 years old, Kunwar Singh was a true Rajput lord of the old school, held in high esteem by his tenants. Even the British admired him for his open heartedness and chivalry, and Tayler had earlier assisted him in managing his estates in order to reduce his debts. However, Tayler was later overruled by the lieutenant governor, and Kunwar Singh lapsed into further debt again. He was on the verge of losing his estates and was saved from ruin by the mutiny of the sepoy. Assuming command of the mutineers who swelled his ranks, he overthrew British authority in Shahabad and established his own government. When he came under pressure from the British he marched through Mirzapur to Rewa, hoping to persuade the ruler to join his cause. Failing in this venture, he proceeded to Banda and then to Kalpi to join the Nana Sahib for a joint attack on Cawnpore, which did

not materialise. He then went to Lucknow where he was received with great honour. He marched to Azamgarh where he defeated the British forces under Colonel Milman and occupied the town. Colonel Dames, who had hurried from Ghazipur to Milman's rescue was repulsed when he attacked the city. Stung by two defeats in succession, the British authorities raised the reward for Kunwar Singh's apprehension from Rupees 10,000 to 25,000. Lord Mark Kerr was sent from Allahabad to relieve Azamgarh and was soon joined by Sir Edward Lugard. In the face of the overwhelming strength of the British, Kunwar Singh vacated the town, and crossing the Ganges near Ghazipur, reentered Bihar. His fought his last battle on 23 April 1858 near his home town of Jagdishpur where he inflicted a severe defeat on British forces under Captain Le Grande, killing almost 150 of the 300 men who opposed him. He did not live to savour his victory, dying of his wounds on 24 April 1858. Known as the Lion of Bihar, Kunwar Singh is still revered for his courage and fortitude.³⁷

Jhansi had been annexed by Lord Dalhousie in 1854 on the death of the ruler without a male heir. The fort was garrisoned by the 12th Native Infantry and the widowed Rani Laxmi Bai and her adopted son moved to a palace in the city with their retainers. News of the events at Meerut and other stations soon reached Jhansi and a wing of the 12th stationed in the cantonment outside the fort mutinied on 5 June. Most of the British and Christian population moved inside the fort, except for the British officers who stayed with the men in the lines. On 6 June, the mutineers shot the British officers and laid siege to the fort. Being promised safe passage, the British contingent inside the fort came out on 8 June, but were massacred. Rani Laxmi Bai played no part in the massacre but came under suspicion because the mutineers had approached her for help. After extorting a large sum of money from her, the mutineers left for Delhi. Rani Laxmi Bai sent letters to Major W.C Erskine, the commissioner of Sagar Division, conveying news of the mutiny and the state of anarchy that prevailed in Jhansi. She also sent letters to British authorities at Agra, Indore, Jalaun Gwalior and Jubbulpore. Erskine forwarded her request to the lieutenant governor, asking her to look

after the administration of Jhansi until British authority was restored.

Emboldened by the collapse of British authority, the rulers of the neighbouring states of Orchha and Datia decided to capture Jhansi in September 1857, but were defeated by the soldiers and local chieftains who rallied around the Rani. Meanwhile, Sir Hugh Rose had arrived in Bombay and was appointed commander of the Central India Field Force that was to operate in Malwa, Bundelkhand, Rajputana and Central India. After reducing Garakhota near Sagar, he decided to attack Jhansi. The siege of Jhansi began on 22 March 1858, and the cannonade started three days later. On 31 March, Tantia Tope arrived with 20,000 men but was defeated. The assault on the fort went in on 3 April and after a bitter house-to-house battle lasting over 24 hours, Jhansi fell on 4 April. The city was ransacked and its inmates put to the sword. The Rani escaped to Kalpi, where all rebel leaders had congregated under the leadership of Rao Sahib, a nephew of the Nana. Rose continued to Kalpi, which the rebel leaders were forced to evacuate on 23 May. The Peshwa's forces moved to Gwalior, whose ruler, the Scindia had once been a vassal of the Peshwa but was now an ally of the British. As soon as the Peshwa's forces reached Gwalior, the Scindia fled and the city fell on 1 June without a shot being fired. Sir Hugh Rose did not give them much respite and arrived at Morar outside Gwalior on 16 June. After a hard fought battle, Gwalior was captured on 20 June and the Scindia escorted back to his palace. Rani Laxmi Bai lost her life in the battle, dying a soldier's death on 17 June 1858. The fall of Gwalior marked the end of the Mutiny of 1857, though sporadic incidents continued for another year.³⁸

As already mentioned, the major events connected with the mutiny occurred in units of the Bengal Army, with the armies of the other two Presidencies remaining virtually unaffected. In Bombay, risings occurred at Satara, Kolhapur, Belgaum and Dharwar. At the recently annexed state of Satara, a *chaprasi* (peon) gave the call to the 22nd Native Infantry to rise on 12 June. He was hanged, along with 16 other conspirators, including the son of Rangaji Bapaji, who had argued the case against the annexation

of the state in London. The 27th, 28th and 29th Regiments of the Bombay Army at Kolhapur, Belgaum and Dharwar respectively had a high percentage of *pardesis* from Oudh. On 31 July the *pardesis* of the 27th plundered the treasury and many fled to the Sawantwadi jungles. A detachment of European troops sent from Poona later disarmed the 27th Regiment. Next day, 21 were convicted, two hanged, 11 shot and eight blown from guns. At Belgaum a conspiracy of a mutiny in the 28th Regiment was discovered on 10 August. Two men were tried and executed. In Bombay, where three regiments of the Bombay Army were garrisoned, it was discovered that a mutiny was planned during the Diwali festival in October. Eight men were arrested, of which two were executed, and six transported for life. In September, attempts to mutiny were detected at Hyderabad (Sind) and Ahmedabad, while at Karachi, a mutiny actually occurred. Kolhapur was again disaffected, and a group that seized the town was dislodged, with 36 being tried and executed.³⁹

In the Madras Army there were a few incidents of disaffection due to the presence of the *pardesi* elements, who had their sympathies with the sepoys of the Bengal Army. At Nagpur the 1st Cavalry of the Nagpur Subsidiary Force was disarmed when on the verge of mutiny and three ringleaders were hanged on 29 June 1857. At Madras, the 8th Madras Cavalry refused to embark for Bengal and was disbanded. After a mutiny at Raipur, on 22 January 1858, during which a sergeant major was killed, two troopers from the 3rd Madras Cavalry and 15 men from the Madras Artillery were hanged.⁴⁰

The principal reasons for the failure of the mutiny were lack of a clear aim, poor planning and coordination, absence of central leadership, indifference of large sections of the civil population and non-involvement of the Bengal and Madras Armies. The British were able to offset their inferiority in numbers by enlisting the support of several Indian princely states, as well as the Sikhs and Gurkhas. After overcoming the initial shock and reverses in the early stages of the mutiny, the East India Company was able to draw on the vast resources of the British Empire for reinforcements and material. The mutiny had a good chance of ending British rule in India when it broke

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out, but with each passing day the probability decreased. More than a year elapsed before the disturbances ceased and normalcy returned. But things could never be the same again. The mutiny was a cataclysm that left deep scars on the psyche of the British rulers and the natives of the country.

The mutiny of 1857 was not preplanned. Though the greased cartridges were the reason that triggered the outbreak at Meerut, two weeks elapsed from the time the men refused the cartridges to the actual outbreak on 10 May 1857. The incident at Barrackpore involving Mangal Pandey had occurred more than a month earlier, and another at Lucknow a week earlier. The garrison at Delhi mutinied on 16 May, though the rebel troopers from Meerut had arrived five days earlier. Thereafter, troops at several cantonments rose on different dates, right up to the end of the year. One can safely conclude that though the Mutiny was inevitable, it was not premeditated. Commenting on the causes of the failure of the mutiny, an eminent historian, Dr. Tara Chand, writes:

The failure of the Revolt was a foregone conclusion. It was actuated by pure negations. It was not inspired by any positive creative idea; it did not entertain either the vision of a higher social order or of a higher political system. It was a transient intoxication and not a settled permanent transformation of the will of the people. As it was an almost spontaneous episodic outburst, there was no stable well-ordered organisation behind the movement as a whole. It lacked plan, programme and funds. The only thing that united the rebels was the desire to eliminate foreign rule.⁴¹

At the outbreak of the mutiny, native troops outnumbered their British counter parts more than five times. The number of European officers in the three Presidency Armies was 6,170 and that of European soldiers 39,352. Against this, the number of native sepoy was 232,224. However, the mutiny failed because the number of sepoy that joined the uprising was much smaller. The sepoy of the Madras and Bombay Armies did not revolt. Even in the Bengal Army, only about 70,000 sepoy actually joined the mutiny, with

about 30,000 remaining loyal up to the end and an equal number deserting or being disarmed. It is safe to assume that the British would have been in dire straits if the whole of the Bengal Army had mutinied, and the sepoy in the armies of other presidencies joined them.⁴²

Though the sepoy fought valiantly, they could not match European tactics and technology. No Indian held commissioned rank at that time, and the highest rank a native could achieve was that of subedar major. The artillery was almost entirely in the hands of Europeans, who also manned the electric telegraph, which played a crucial role. Not realising the value of the telegraph, the rebels made no efforts to disrupt it, except at a few places such as Lucknow and Delhi. Consequently, the governor-general in Calcutta was able to obtain information and pass instructions without hindrance to almost every British official in the sub continent. Writing to C. Raikes, ICS, in Agra on 18 August 1857, Robert Montgomery, the judicial commissioner of the Punjab remarked: “Under Providence, the electric telegraph has saved us.”⁴³

Historians differ on the nature of the mutiny and its political significance. Some feel that it was purely a military uprising with little popular support from the masses, which was the most important reason for its failure. Others believe that it was a political revolt spurred by an upsurge of nationalism in the common people who wanted to break free from the bondage of British rule. The latter opinion conforms to the views of those who describe the uprising of 1857 as the first war of Indian independence. According to Surendra Nath Sen:

...it would be wrong to dismiss it as a mere military rising. The Mutiny became a revolt and assumed a political character when the mutineers of Meerut placed themselves under the King of Delhi and a section of the landed aristocracy and civil population declared in his favour. What began as a fight for religion ended as a war of independence for there is not the slightest doubt that the rebels wanted to get rid of the alien government and restore the old order of which the King of Delhi was the rightful representative.⁴⁴

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The end of the mutiny also saw the end of the rule of the East India Company. In November 1858, Queen Victoria issued a proclamation taking over the responsibility for governing India. A Royal Commission, presided over by Major General Jonathan Peel was set up to enquire into the events of 1857 and recommend changes to avoid recurrence of similar incidents. Based on the report of the Peel Commission, sweeping changes were carried out. The number of British troops in India was increased from 38,000 to 62,000, while the native component was reduced from 230,000 to 135,000. The native component in the artillery was done away with, and it was now manned entirely by Europeans. The recruitment pattern of the Bengal Army was changed, with the recruitment of Brahmins and Rajputs from Oudh, the Northwestern Provinces and Bihar being severely curtailed. The number of irregular cavalry units on the *silladar* system was increased, since experience had shown that most of them had not been disaffected.

The mutiny of 1857 was an important landmark in the history of India. This was the first instance when large sections of the populace came together with the common aim of throwing out an alien power. Though India was not unified as a country, this was the first occasion when a nationalistic feeling was seen among the people. The sepoys who started the uprising and the people who joined them were from all religions and castes, and from every social and economic group, which was an exceptional occurrence in the subcontinent. Since the fight was for freedom from British vassalage, the mutiny of 1857 can rightfully lay claim to the title of the first war of Indian independence. The leading role of the sepoy in the uprising cannot be disputed. In the Foreword to S. N. Sen's book *Eighteen Fifty Seven*, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad wrote: "There would have been no revolt in India in 1857 had not the initiative been taken by the disaffected sepoys." 45

Notes

This chapter is largely based on J.W. Kaye's *A History of the Sepoy War in India* (London, 1877); G.W. Forrest's *A History of the Indian Mutiny* (London, 1904); S.N.

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Sen's *Eighteen Fifty - Seven* (New Delhi, 1957); Lt Gen. S.L. Menezes' *Fidelity & Honour* (New Delhi, 1993); and Dr. Tara Chand's *History of the Freedom Movement in India* (New Delhi, 1967) Specific references are given below:

1. S.N. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty - Seven* (New Delhi, 1957), p.6, quoting Gubbins *The Mutinies in Oudh, 3rd Edition, Appendix 12*.
2. Sitaram, *From Sepoy to Subadar: Being the Life and Adventures of a Native Officer of the Bengal Army*, translated by Lieutenant Colonel Norgate, edited by Lieutenant Colonel D.C. Phillot, p.60.
3. Sen, note 1, p. 12.
4. Lt. Gen S.L. Menezes, *Fidelity & Honour* (New Delhi, 1993), p. 120.
5. Sen, note 1, p. 15.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
7. Menezes, note 4, p.121, quoting A Retired Officer, *Mutiny in the Bengal Army* London: 1857), p. 4.
8. J.W. Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India 1857-1858* (3 vols, London, 1877), vol i, pp.278-89.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 291-293.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 294-296.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 318.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 342-345.
13. Sen, note 1, p. 31.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 35-7.
16. Menezes, note 4, p. 151, quoting J.G.A. Baird, *The Private Letters of the Marquess of Dalhousie* (Shannon, 1972), p. 369.
17. G.W. Forrest, *A History of the Indian Mutiny* (3 vols, London, 1904), vol i, pp. 1-3.
18. *Ibid.*, pp. 22-4.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-9.
20. Menezes, note 4, p. 160.

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21. Forrest, note 17, p. 33.
22. Captain N.T. Parker, *Memoirs of the Indian Mutiny in Meerut* (Meerut, 1914), p.31.
23. Forrest, note 17, p. 38.
24. Sen, note 1, p. 106.
25. Forrest, note 17, pp. 474-479.
26. Kaye, note 8, vol ii, pp. 216-226
27. Sen, note 1, p.152.
28. Forrest, note 17, p. 333.
29. Sen, note 1, p. 239.
30. Forrest, note 17, pp. 207-13.
31. Menezes, note 4, p. 169.
32. Sen, note 1, p. 328
33. Menezes, note 4, p. 170.
34. Sen, note 1, p. 330.
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36. Kaye, note 8, vol. iii, pp. 93-94.
37. Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India* (3 vols, New Delhi, 1967), vol. ii, p. 102 and Sen, note 1, pp. 260- 261.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 103 and Sen, note 1, pp. 264-293.
39. Menezes, note 4, pp. 180-181, quoting T. Rice Holmes, *A History of the Indian Mutiny* (London 1898), pp.467-470.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
41. Tara Chand, note 37, p. 106 .
42. Kaye, note 4, p. 626 and Sen, note 1, p. 408.
43. Brigadier T. Barreto, *History of the Corps of Signals*, Vol. 1, p.34, quoting “Records of the Intelligence Department of the Government of the North West Province during the Mutiny of 1857”, p. 491.
44. Sen, note 1, p. 413.
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4

The Singapore Mutiny – 1915

The mutiny in the 5th Light Infantry at Singapore that took place in 1915 is important for several reasons. It occurred at a time when World War I was in full swing, and a large number of Indian troops were fighting on various fronts. Though the nationalist movement in India had taken root and was fairly well developed, its leaders had extended unequivocal support to Britain as soon as the war broke out. Many factors contributed to the outbreak of the mutiny. However, none of them appeared serious enough to warrant such a drastic step by seasoned troops belonging to a regiment that had earned the sobriquet “The Loyal Fifth” for its past services. In addition to several Europeans, the mutineers killed their own officers, dealing a serious blow to the almost sacred theory that Indian troops fought not for the king or their country but for their regiments and the British officers who led them. This was perhaps the first mutiny in a regular unit of the Indian Army that was inspired, at least in part, by a nationalist movement that was not home-grown but had been born in another country – the Ghadar movement.

The mutiny caught the British authorities in Singapore by surprise and would have succeeded, had the mutineers been properly organised and led. Acting on the spur of the moment, they rose against their superiors without having made a plan of action. Also, they made no attempt to obtain any help from the civil population, which included a large number of people of Indian origin. There were almost no forces available in the island to suppress the mutiny, and it was only with the help of troops of other nationalities that

the authorities were able to regain control. Retribution was swift and severe. Within a month, two Indian officers and 200 men of the 5th Light Infantry were tried by court martial. All, except one sepoy, were convicted. Both the officers and 45 sepoys were sentenced to death, 64 to transportation for life, and the remainder to terms of imprisonment varying from one to twenty years. Eleven men of the Malay States Guides who had joined the mutiny were also tried and sentenced to simple imprisonment from 11 months to two years. The executions were carried out publicly, the guilty men being shot in front of thousands of Chinese, Malays and Indians outside the Outram Road Prison in Singapore.¹

The Ghadar (Revolution) party came into being in 1913 in San Francisco, taking its name from the newspaper called *Ghadar*, which began to be brought out in November of that year by Lala Hardayal. It found support among the large number of Indian emigrants then living in Canada and the USA, who had left their homelands due to famine and unemployment, especially in the Punjab. The avowed aim of the Ghadar party was to end British rule in India by fomenting an armed revolution. Just before the outbreak of World War II, the *Komagata Maru* incident took place. In April 1914, Gurdit Singh, an Indian businessman living in Singapore, chartered a Japanese ship, the *Komagata Maru*, to carry Indian emigrants from Hong Kong to Canada. When the ship reached Vancouver, the Canadian authorities, under British pressure, did not allow the 376 passengers (24 Muslims, 12 Hindus and 340 Sikhs) to land. After spending two months moored in the harbour, without supplies and water, the ship began its return journey. Touching Yokohama, Kobe and Singapore, the *Komagata Maru* finally arrived at Budge Budge near Calcutta where the authorities had arranged a special train to carry them to Punjab. However, the passengers refused to board the train and tried to enter the city. The police tried to stop them but was unsuccessful. Finally, troops had to be called in to subdue the mob and round up the passengers, many of which had escaped. There was a riot and firing from both sides, resulting in several casualties. Several members of the Calcutta

and Punjab Police were killed, in addition to some civilians and railway officials. Of the Sikh rioters, 18 died in the firing by British troops, giving rise to considerable resentment.² Though the passengers had not been allowed to land at Singapore, their plight was known to the Indian residents of the city. Several Ghadriles, as the members of the Ghadar Party came to be known, transited through Singapore on their way to India from Canada and the USA, spreading subversive propaganda among the Indians. These Ghadriles also made contact with Indian troops, especially the Sikhs of the Malay States Guides and with the Muslims of the 5th Light Infantry.³

When World War II began, the British garrison in Singapore comprised two infantry battalions, the 1st Battalion, The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and the 5th Light Infantry. There was also a mule battery of the Malay States Guides and some gunners of the Royal Garrison Artillery. The senior British officer in the station was Brigadier General D.H. Ridout, general officer commanding the troops in the Straits Settlements. After the sinking of the German raider *Emden* in November 1914, the major threat to Singapore from the sea diminished, and it was decided to send the British battalion to the Western Front, leaving the Indian battalion as the only regular infantry unit in Singapore. The composition of the 5th Light Infantry was somewhat unusual in that it was composed entirely of Muslims. It was organised in two wings (four companies in each), one having Hindustani Mussalmans (Pathans and Baluchis) and the other comprising 'Ranghars' (Muslim Rajputs from East Punjab and Delhi). The strength of the battalion was about 800. The mule battery of the Malay States Guides was a predominantly Sikh unit of about 100 men, which was plagued by internal troubles in the form of a religious divide known as the 'Majah-Malwa' conflict, which necessitated men from the two regions being grouped into separate companies. The unit had come under a cloud after it refused to serve overseas in 1914.

The 5th Light Infantry was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel E.V. Martin, with Major William L. Cotton as the second-in-command. The Right Wing (Ranghars) comprised No. 1 and 2 Double Companies,

commanded by Captains Lionel R. Ball and P. Boyce respectively. The Left Wing (Hindustani Mussalmans), which did not mutiny, comprised No. 3 and 4 Double Companies, commanded by Lieutenant H.S. Eliot and Captain William. D. Hall respectively. The senior Indian officer in the battalion was Subedar Major Khan Mohammad Khan. Lieutenant Colonel Martin had previously served in the unit as the second-in-command. The then commanding officer did not think very highly of his abilities and had him posted to another unit for three months to earn a 'special report', after which he returned as the commanding officer, to the surprise and chagrin of many officers and men. Matters worsened when he initiated adverse reports on two officers who he felt had been working against him during the tenure of the previous commanding officer. Soon, the unit was split in two groups, with some of the men seeing the commanding officer over the heads of their wing commanders and officers. Another matter that had split the battalion into two camps was the squabble over the promotion of a Ranghar non commissioned officer, Colour Havildar Imtiaz Ali, who was passed over twice, under the influence of officers from the other wing. The Ranghars were very bitter about the perceived injustice. ⁴

Apart from the political influence of the Ghadar Party, the unit was also affected by propaganda of German and Turkish agents who preached that it was wrong for Muslims to fight against Turkey, the seat of the *Khalifa* (Caliph) of Islam. A *maulvi* (Muslim priest) at a mosque near Alexandra Barracks regularly preached this line to the sepoys of the 5th Light Infantry. Similar propaganda was disseminated by an Indian merchant, Kasim Ismail Mansur, who ran a coffee shop that was much frequented by the soldiers. The battalion often provided guards at the prisoner of war camp where several sailors from the *Emden* were interned. The German prisoners convinced the Indian soldiers that the Kaiser himself was a Muslim and a descendant of the Prophet. The soldiers began to believe that the Germans were Muslims and Britain had embarked on a war against Islam.⁵

The 5th Light Infantry was under orders to move on 16 February 1915. It

was to go to Hong Kong but this was not conveyed to the men for security reasons. Rumours that the battalion was going to Mesopotamia to fight against the Turks began to circulate among the men. At 7 am on 15 February, Brigadier General Ridout inspected the battalion at Alexandra Barracks. In his farewell address, he complimented the battalion and referred to their impending departure. His speech in English was translated into Hindustani by the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Martin. The translation was not very clear and tended to create some confusion among the men. Their destination, Hong Kong, was not mentioned in the speech. After the address by the general officer commanding, two sepoy of A Company (Right Half) fell out to make complaints regarding their applications for discharge, which were disposed off under his directions. The Right Half was then dismissed and marched off to their lines. While moving off, some Ranghars shouted in protest against the Left Wing being detained for the purpose of examination of havildars for promotion to commissioned grade, which they felt should have gone to one of their own, Colour Havildar Imtiaz Ali.

After lunching with the officers of the 5th, General Ridout drove back to his bungalow in Tanglin. By this time, the unit's heavy baggage and equipment, including machine guns, had already been sent down to the *Nore*, the troop ship that was to take them to Hong Kong. Small arms and ammunition was to be moved the next morning. But after the parade, Lieutenant Colonel Martin changed his mind and ordered the removal of the ammunition that afternoon. Shortly after 2 pm, the ammunition was loaded in a lorry at the regimental magazine under the supervision of Lieutenant Elliot. The lorry then proceeded to the quartermaster's stores where some oil drums were being loaded. At about 3 pm a shot was fired at the ammunition lorry from the direction of the quarter guard. This was the signal for the commencement of the mutiny. The fatigue parties vanished, except for a sepoy of C Company who was later shot in two places and crawled to his barrack room. A and B Companies turned out en masse, led by Colour Havildar Imtiaz Ali and Havildar Ibrahim respectively. While A Company attacked and looted the

ammunition lorry, B Company ransacked the magazine that contained 26,600 rounds of ammunition. They were soon joined by the remainder of the Right Wing i.e. C and D Companies.

Within a few minutes of the first shot being fired, Subedar Major Khan Mohammad Khan rushed to the residence of the commanding officer and informed him that the Right Wing had mutinied and the Left Wing had apparently dispersed. Colonel Martin immediately warned headquarters at Fort Canning and telephoned General Ridout. Meanwhile, Major Cotton (second-in-command), Captain Ball (commander No. 1 Double Company) and Captain Boyce (commander No. 2 Double Company) rushed to the Indian officers' quarters, where they met Subedars Mohammed Yunus and Dunde Khan and Jemadars Chisti Khan, Abdul Ali and Hoshiar Ali. The British officers wanted to go to their respective double companies but were restrained by the Indian officers, who told them that their lives would be endangered, since they could no longer control the men. (It later transpired that they were, in fact, the ringleaders who had planned and organised the uprising). The British officers decided to go to the camp of the Malaya State Volunteer Rifles at Normanton Barracks to procure assistance. On the way, Captain Boyce lost his way. (He was subsequently found murdered). Major Cotton and Captain Ball managed to reach Normanton Barracks and warn the Malaya State Volunteer Rifles.

Though the Left Wing did not take active part in the mutiny, they became virtually ineffective as soon as the alarm was given. Both No. 3 and No. 4 Double Companies fell in without ammunition under the command of their commanders, Lieutenant Elliot and Captain Hall. Both tried to gain control of their men and encouraged them to stand firm. A burst of firing caused Elliot's men to break and disperse into the jungle. Accompanied by Jemadar Fattu, Elliot tried to follow them but was apparently overtaken by a body of mutineers and killed. Hall moved his double company towards the commanding officer's bungalow. Being without ammunition, he ordered his men to fix bayonets and was preparing to charge the mutineers when a heavy

burst of fire from the direction of the Indian officers' quarters caused the men to panic and disperse into the jungle. A few men remained with Hall and he soon picked up another small body under Subedar Suleman. Eventually, Captain Hall and his party of about 50 men reached the Normanton Barracks and joined Major Cotton and Captain Ball. The Malay States Volunteer Rifles turned out a body of some 80 rifles under Captain Sydney Smith. Accompanied by Captain Hall's men of No 4 Double Company, they moved to the commanding officer's bungalow's towards which the mutineers were reported to have gone. ⁶

The mutineers of the Right Wing made their way towards the commanding officer's bungalow, where they were joined by some Sikhs of the battery of the Malay States Guides that was located near the 5th Light Infantry. However, the involvement of the Guides was brief – after killing Captain Mackean, an officer of the Royal Garrison Artillery who was on attachment with them, they disappeared, taking no further part in the proceedings. Later, many of them were found in Malaya, marching north. They claimed they were on their way to their depot at Taiping near Perak. A few returned to their barracks or reported to police stations in Singapore. The Sikhs' sudden change of heart in distancing themselves from the mutiny was probably because they did not wish to get involved with Ranghars whom they regarded as inferior.

Meanwhile, the mutineers had split into three groups. The largest group of 100-150 men under Subedar Dunde Khan proceeded to the lines of the Malay States Guides, who were given arms and intimidated to join them. This group then prepared to attack the commanding officer's bungalow, where the subedar major, the second-in-command and his wife and two other officers had taken shelter. The second small group, an offshoot of the first group, proceeded to the Sepoy Lines where they murdered some officers before moving towards Singapore by the circuitous Pasir Panjang Road. The third group of about 80 men under Havildar Ibrahim moved across country towards Tanglin, where the camp for German prisoners was located.

The group moving towards Singapore met and killed a Singapore District

Judge, Mr C.V. Dyson, and then shot dead Mr Marshall of the China Mutual Insurance Company, and Mr B.M. Woolcombe of the Eastern Extension Telegraph Company and his wife. Some sepoy, instead of taking the turning to the city, carried on towards Pasir Panjang. On their way, they passed a seaside bungalow where three Europeans – McGilvray, Dunn and Butterworth – were enjoying a lounge and a smoke in the verandah. They shot all three. The mutineers who had turned towards the city killed five Europeans, including one of their own officers, Lieutenant Elliot. A couple of civilians who were fired upon managed to escape, racing back to the city to spread the alarm.

The group that had proceeded to Tanglin reached the internment camp at about 4 pm, catching the guards totally unprepared, thanks to a delay in passage of the information about the mutiny. Guard duties at the camp were being carried out by men of the Singapore Volunteer Rifles with the assistance of some men from the Johore State Forces, the private army of the Sultan of Johore, who was on friendly terms with the British. General Ridout, soon after the call from Colonel Martin at about 3 pm, had left for his headquarters in Fort Canning, leaving instructions with his wife to telephone and warn the Tanglin camp. For some inexplicable reason, Mrs Ridout was able to get through to the guard commander, Lieutenant Love Montgomerie just as the mutineers reached the camp. She had just begun talking to him when she heard shots and the line went dead. After killing Montgomerie the mutineers ran into the camp, where they killed the commandant, two captains, two corporals and four privates of the Singapore Volunteer Rifles. They also killed two British sergeants, a Malay officer, two Malay soldiers and a German prisoner of war. The mutineers threw open the gates of the camp, telling the German and Austrian prisoners that they were free. Very few of them took up the offer, most preferring to stay in the camp and tend to the wounds of the guards. Finally, only 17 Germans left the camp, of whom four were later recaptured, the remainder getting away to the neutral Dutch East Indies. It was later discovered that the prisoners had been working on a tunnel that was almost complete, and would have escaped after a few days

had the mutiny not taken place. In view of this, their reluctance to leave the camp appeared strange. Apparently, most of them seemed to think that taking advantage of the mutiny was not an honourable way to achieve freedom, and declined the opportunity.

One of the German prisoners who escaped was Lieutenant Jules Lauterbach, the former navigating officer of the *Emden*, who was reported to have had a hand in encouraging the men of the 5th Light Infantry to mutiny. The mutineers were counting on him to lead them, and were surprised when they realised that he was only interested in getting out of Singapore with some of his crew. Lauterbach was later to command the German raider *Mowe* which, like the *Emden*, took a heavy toll of British shipping. The mutineers were also astonished by the behaviour of the German prisoners, who seemed more interested in helping their wounded British captors than escaping. They soon realised that they had been misled about the Germans – some believed them to be Turks, of their own faith. Bewildered and puzzled, the mutineers did not know what to do next, and broke up. Some went into Singapore in search of the Turkish warship that Mansur, the coffee shop owner, had told them would take them off the island. Others crossed the Straits into the Johore jungles, hoping to escape from British reprisal that they knew would follow soon.

As soon as he reached his office at Fort Canning, General Ridout sent a message to HMS *Cadmus* that was in the harbour. Fortunately the ratings had not been given shore leave and could be mustered. Apart from the police that had been alerted by Captain Ball and the Singapore Volunteer Rifles, Ridout also had at his disposal a detachment of 36th Sikhs who were in transit to their regiment at Weihaiwei in China. He also spoke to the Japanese Consul who hastily enrolled 190 of his nationals as special constables, who were issued with rifles by the police. With the help of the available forces, Ridout placed armed guards on all public buildings and docks. He concentrated the volunteers at the drill hall and the police at the Orchard Road Police Station. A number of cars were requisitioned, hastily armoured with sheets of metal,

and used to bring European women and children from the suburbs. They were given temporary refuge at Government House and later taken aboard some of the ships in Keppel Harbour. A landing party of 80 ratings from the *Cadmus* was positioned to block the entry of mutineers into the city from the Pasi Panjang area. Martial law was proclaimed at 6.30 pm. By sunset, the island was in a reasonable state of defence. ⁷

Meanwhile, the commanding officer's bungalow was still under siege. During the night, the mutineers kept up sniping fire but were deterred from an outright attack by a searchlight at nearby Blakang Mati that lighted up the bungalow. The mutineers also fired occasional shots at police stations in the city. At Alexandra Road Police Station, Dr A.F. Legge of the Singapore Volunteer Medical Company was killed as he moved to attend to a mortally wounded soldier. At Bukit Timah Police Station, 138 men of the 5th Light Infantry surrendered, while two mutineers were killed in an exchange of fire at Orchard Road Police Station. Surprisingly, life in the city went on as usual. The Chinese remained blissfully unaware of the mutiny, mistaking the sounds of firing for crackers being burst as part of New Year celebrations. At the railway station the mail train from Penang came in on time and the night mail departed on schedule. On board the Penang train were 150 men of the Johore State Forces under the personal command of the Sultan who had responded to a call from the Governor, Sir Arthur Young.

During the night, a force had been assembled to relieve the party in the Commanding Officer's house. At dawn on 16 February, Lieutenant Colonel C.W. Brownlow led a combined force of 80 men from HMS *Cadmus*, 50 men of the Singapore Volunteer Corps, 21 men of the Royal Garrison Artillery and 25 armed civilians. Advancing from Keppel harbour, the force occupied the barracks that were not held in strength. Further advance was held up by heavy fire from a higher ridge, which had to be cleared by an attack from the left by the men from the *Cadmus* and the Singapore Volunteer Corps. The mutineers were pushed back and the force reached Colonel Martin's bungalow. Since the force was outnumbered by the mutineers, it was decided

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to retire to Keppel Harbour with the relieved personnel. The relieving force lost two men in the action, with four being wounded. Of the mutineers, 11 were killed. ⁸

On the way back to the city, Colonel Brownlow's force swept the golf course at Tanglin and other stretches of open country, picking up between 30 and 40 sepoys. During the day many others surrendered all over Singapore. Some had taken refuge in mosques until they judged it safe to reappear. During the same morning, the Veteran Company of the Singapore Volunteer Corps occupied Tanglin Barracks without opposition and took charge of the prisoners of war. The Volunteers were also deployed to guard Government House, General Hospital and Fort Canning. The Japanese special constables raised by the Japanese consul were sent to various police stations, where they provided armed patrols. As a precautionary measure, all ladies and children were removed from hotels to the ships in the harbour during the day.

Apart from the Japanese, the British authorities received assistance from several other nations. Wireless messages had been sent to ships at sea and in the harbour, asking for help to quell the mutiny. The French cruiser *Montcalm* that had sailed from Singapore on the day the mutiny broke out turned back as soon as it got the message, docking in the morning on 17 February. The Japanese cruiser *Otowa* arrived the same afternoon. A party of 190 men with two machine guns from the *Montcalm* proceeded by motor transport to the Seletar District where a group of mutineers had been reported. Before their arrival, however, the mutineers crossed over to Johore where 61 of them surrendered to the Sultan's forces. On the morning of 18 February Colonel Brownlow's force, reinforced with 76 men from the *Otowa* marched out from Keppel Harbour and occupied Alexandra Barracks, capturing six men. A party of the Japanese then proceeded to Normanton Barracks where it captured 12 mutineers. The same afternoon the Russian cruiser *Orel* arrived and sent 40 men ashore. By this time, the situation was under control and Government House issued an announcement that the

position was completely in hand. On 19 February, another Japanese cruiser, the *Tsuchima* arrived with 75 men. She was followed on 20 February by the SS *Edvana* from Rangoon, carrying six companies of the 4th Battalion of the Shropshire Light Infantry (Territorials). By the evening of 22 February, one week after the outbreak, 614 men of the 5th Light Infantry had surrendered. It was estimated that 56 mutineers had been killed or drowned.⁹

Even as the hunt continued for the remaining fugitives, proceedings against the captives had begun, with the first of the executions being carried out on 23 February 1915. Of the 202 persons tried by court martial, 47 were sentenced to death and the remainder to varying terms of imprisonment. Though public execution had been terminated in 1890's, the practice was revived for the Singapore mutiny. The executions took place outside Outram Road Prison, watched by thousands of people. The firing parties were drawn from units that had suffered casualties at the hands of the mutineers in the proportion of five soldiers firing at one man being executed. The largest execution of 21 mutineers was carried out on 25 March by a firing party of 105 drawn from the Singapore Volunteer Corps and the Singapore Volunteer Artillery Maxim Company. The two Indian officers who had instigated the mutiny, Subedar Dunde Khan and Jemadar Chisti Khan were executed on 21 April by a firing squad of ten men from the Royal Garrison Artillery. The last executions took place on 17 May 1915. The first volley usually failed to kill the condemned men, necessitating a second volley from a shorter distance. Even then warders had to walk along the line with pistols to finish the proceedings. There was considerable debate on the manner in which the executions were carried out, with some persons recommending the use of automatic weapons such as machine guns instead of rifles to hasten the death of the condemned men.¹⁰

A first hand account of one of the executions by Nishimura, a Japanese doctor, brings out the poignancy of the proceedings and the feelings among the local population. Witnessing the execution on 1 April 1915, Nishimura writes:

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These days, in the afternoon, a music band goes out from the post of the Volunteers in Beach Road to play cheerfully and walk through the city. When I asked what had happened, answer was: 'Mutineers were shot dead.' Those who witnessed the scene of public execution told me: 'Last moments of the lives of Indian mutineers were really praiseworthy'. They are brave and firm in their thought. There is none who died a shameful death.' I also wanted to see the scene for my information and walked to the execution ground.

5 o'clock in the evening. Piles were driven at intervals of ten *shaku* (3 metres) in the lawn outside the wall of Outram Road prison. People are crowded along the road or the incline inside the hospital. More than twenty thousand spectators were there. The execution ground can be clearly seen by all as they occupied their places on the layered slope. Crowds are waiting for the moment, holding their breaths. At five thirty, six mutineers were brought there accompanied by six stretchers and guarded by thirty soldiers. They obeyed to (sic) the command of soldiers and stood in front of the stakes. A British Major read the promulgation of the sentences. One mutineer said something indignantly. It was spoken in an Indian language, which I could not understand.

Five gunners took aim at one mutineer and delivered a volley of fire to him with the order of a commander. Simultaneously with the sound of the gunfire five mutineers fell down miserably, but the last person remained standing and breathed his last. A medical officer confirmed their deaths formally, and the dead bodies on the stretchers covered by white cloths were taken back to the Prison. They were alive when they came here, and left in death. This is the fourth execution since it started. Those mutineers who believed in the never-ending cycle of reincarnation died admirably. The reputation in the city is not false. ¹¹

The mutiny in the 5th Light Infantry in Singapore in 1915 has been well documented, though opinions differ on its character. The British authorities treated it as a military revolt, instigated by disgruntled elements within

the regiment. Others felt that it was a manifestation of the growing feeling of nationalism among soldiers in the Indian Army, who had begun to question their role in fighting for an alien power. The leaders of revolutionary movements outside India, such as the Ghadar Party, claimed that the mutiny was part of their plan to overthrow British rule in India. The mutiny failed because of poor leadership, lack of a precise programme and absence of coordination with revolutionary movements in other parts of the world. It is well known that the ambitious plans of the Ghadar Party to incite revolts in India and several places were thwarted by British intelligence and due to several other reasons, including ill luck. Had their plans succeeded, the British authorities would have found it difficult to spare forces to quell the mutiny in Singapore, which was then denuded of regular troops and warships.

It is difficult to single out a specific factor that was responsible for the mutiny. Though World War I had started, Singapore was far removed from theatres where Indian troops were fighting. This naturally led to doubts among the Indian officers and men of the 5th Light Infantry about their role in the war. The entry of Turkey in the war against Britain complicated the issue, especially for Muslim soldiers who treated the *Khalifa* as their religious head. The influence of Kasim Ismail Mansur, the 'pro-Turkish' merchant who had close contacts with the soldiers may have augmented the reluctance of the latter to go to war. The refusal of the Malay States Guides to go to war in 1914 added to the misgivings of the men of the 5th Light Infantry. The effect of their intimacy with the German prisoners of the *Emden* interned at Singapore cannot be discounted. Finally, the *Komagata Maru* incident and the passage of Ghadrities through Singapore had sown the seed of nationalism among the soldiers. All that was needed was a spark, and this was provided by the issue of promotion and uncertainty about being sent to fight against their co-religionists.

The British authorities suppressed the revolt with the help of several foreign powers, including France, Russia and Japan. There was a heated debate in Japan on the propriety of using Japanese soldiers and civilian

volunteers to quell the mutiny. The Third Anglo-Japanese Alliance that had been concluded in 1911 provided for Britain and Japan to assist each other in case of aggression by a third party against their territories in India and East Asia. However, it did not provide for suppression of mutinies and internal disturbances. Japan had helped Britain in capturing Tsintao from the Germans in 1914. But its assistance to Britain in suppressing the mutiny in Singapore in 1915 was questioned by many, including officers in the Japanese Navy. At that time, several Indian revolutionaries had made Japan their home, in the hope of obtaining her support in gaining independence from British rule. The Indian nationalist movement was supported by large sections of the Japanese people, who felt that the actions of their Consul in Singapore dealt a severe blow to Indian aspirations.

A Japanese scholar who has carried out a deep study of the Singapore Mutiny is Sho Kuwajima, of the Department of India and Pakistan, Osaka University of Foreign Studies. According to him, “Singapore Mutiny was an expression of both anti-war feelings which derived from daily feelings of Indian soldiers and their aspiration for freedom which was encouraged by the continuous and pervasive propaganda of the Ghadr Party. The lack of revolutionary leadership and their programme blurred the basic character of the Mutiny”.¹²

Notes

This chapter is largely based on Sho Kuwajima’s *First World War and Asia – Indian Mutiny in Singapore (1915)*, (Osaka, 1988), Gerard H. Corr’s *The War of the Springing Tigers* (London, 1975); Khushwant Singh’s *The History of the Sikhs, Vol II* (Delhi, 1991); and Lt Gen. S.L. Menezes’ *Fidelity & Honour* (New Delhi, 1993). Specific references are given below:

1. Sho Kuwajima, *First World War and Asia – Indian Mutiny in Singapore (1915)*- (Osaka, 1988), p. 68, quoting R.W.E. Harper and Harry Miller, *Singapore Mutiny*, (Singapore, 1984), pp. 203-204.

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2. Bhai Nahar Singh and Kirpal Singh (ed.), *Struggle for Free Hindustan (Ghadar movement), Vol. I, 1905-1916* (New Delhi, 1986), pp. 76-79.
3. Khushwant Singh, *The History of the Sikhs, Vol. II* (Delhi, 1991), pp. 182-183.
4. Lt. Gen S.L. Menezes, *Fidelity & Honour* (New Delhi, 1993), p.278.
5. Gerard H. Corr, *The War of the Springing Tigers* (London, 1975), pp. 7-8.
6. Kuwajima, note 1, pp. 43-48.
7. Corr, note 5, pp. 9-12.
8. Kuwajima, note 1, p. 65, quoting D Moore, *The First 150 Years of Singapore*, Singapore, 1969), p. 550.
9. Kuwajima, note 1, pp. 65-67.
10. Menezes, note 4, p.280.
11. Kuwajima, note 1, pp. 68-69, quoting Takeshiro Nishimura, *Singapore Sanjyugonen (Thirty Five Years in Singapore)*, (Tokyo, 1941), pp.163-164.
12. *Ibid.*, p.126.

5

The Peshawar Mutiny – 1930

The incident, erroneously referred to as the ‘mutiny’ in the 2nd Battalion, 2/18 Royal Garhwal Rifles that occurred in 1930 at Peshawar, is an interesting example of the effect that extraneous factors sometimes have on trivial incidents, magnifying their image and distorting the historical perspective. Though the numbers involved were small – two platoons - and the men behaved with exemplary civility, they were treated with uncharacteristic harshness. The context in which the incident occurred – the Civil Disobedience Movement and the Red Shirt rebellion – played an important role in the gravity assigned to it by the authorities. The seemingly innocuous act of ‘debussing’ from a lorry due to the hot weather was mistaken for an act of defiance and refusal to ‘embus’ for duty. The emotional stress that the men had undergone on the previous day was also ignored, leading to an erroneous conclusion about the intentions and subsequent treatment, not only of the men involved but the entire battalion.

Soon after assuming the office of governor-general in 1899, Lord Curzon carried out several changes in the northwest frontier. In order to reduce military expenditure, tribal levies under British officers replaced regular troops who were withdrawn from tribal territory and concentrated at bases within the administrative border, to be called forward only when needed. To facilitate their rapid deployment, new roads were constructed and light railways extended. The tribesmen were pleased with the arrangement, since they were now paid regular salaries for service with the levies. In addition, allowances were paid to certain important tribes to keep the roads and

passes open. Though Curzon described the arrangement as “confidential communication with the tribes”, they were in effect nothing but bribes to induce the tribesmen to refrain from marauding expeditions.¹

Along with the change in policy, Curzon carried out an important administrative change on the frontier by taking it out of the control of the Punjab Government and creating a new Northwest Frontier Province, which would be administered by a chief commissioner directly responsible to the Government of India. The new province was divided into two parts, with about one-third comprising five fully administered districts under deputy commissioners and the remainder continuing as tribal territory lying between the administrative border and the Durand Line, to which political agents were appointed. Though it improved the administration of the frontier, the change had many far reaching implications, one being the transformation in the composition of the hitherto predominantly Muslim province of Punjab. With the passage of time, the inhabitants of the new province began to feel certain deprivations: living in a frontier province, they missed the political reforms that came to Punjab; they could no longer benefit from the Punjab canal colonies; and they did not enjoy as efficient an administration at the district level as was provided by the Punjab cadre of officers.

Taking note of the resentment among the tribals due to the exclusion of the frontier from political reforms, the Government of India intended to deal with the grievance, but there was a delay in implementing the remedial measures. During this period, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan initiated a movement to bring about political and social changes in the frontier. To help him on this task, he organised a group of volunteers who called themselves *Khudai Khidmatgars* (Servants of God). From the colour of their dress, they came to be known as the Red Shirts. Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan was an admirer of Mahatma Gandhi and his creed of non-violence, which he adopted. Though not a member of the Congress Party, he was involved in their activities and attended their annual sessions as a special invitee. In time to come, he became known as the “Frontier Gandhi”.²

The Peshawar Mutiny – 1930

The 2nd Battalion, 18th Royal Garhwal Rifles had moved from its home base at Lansdowne to the Khyber in the Northwest Frontier Province in November 1927. After tours of duty at Landi Khana and Landi Kotal, the battalion moved to Peshawar on 26 October 1929, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel C.C. Walker. In March 1930, Mahatma Gandhi initiated the Civil Disobedience movement, leading to widespread agitations and arrests of Congress leaders all over the country. Since the population of the Northwest Frontier Province was predominantly Muslim, it was expected to remain unaffected by the call for civil disobedience. However, authorities at all stations were instructed to remain alert for any sign of trouble, and make preparations to deal with them. At a conference of civil military officials, it was decided that the Garhwalis would provide a column to act as a “police reserve” at the disposal of the senior police officer on the spot. Before and after the conference, the men were lectured on their duties and it was impressed upon them that there was to be no firing, nor offensive action, except on a direct order from a British officer or to save their own lives or unless authorised by a magistrate in writing. The results of the incorrect ‘briefing’ were to become obvious a week later.³

Though Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and his followers were not directly involved in the agitation that was taking place all over the country, the authorities in Peshawar issued arrest warrants for twelve members of the Red Shirt party on 22 April 1930. Early next morning, the police arrested ten of them, including Ghaffar Khan, the remaining two being found and arrested at about 9.30 a.m. by when news of the first arrests had spread. The lorries carrying the last two prisoners and the police were stopped by a crowd and reached the Kabuli gate police station with difficulty, where they were soon besieged by an irate mob, leading to violent protests. The deputy commissioner went into the city, escorted by a troop of armoured cars, whose presence further infuriated the mob. As he withdrew, the British motorcycle despatch rider, between the first and second armoured cars, was attacked and killed. The miscreants doused his motorcycle and the second armoured

car with petrol and set them on fire. Eventually the deputy commissioner, who had been hit on the head by a brick, gave orders for fire to be opened. One of the armoured cars fired two bursts of ten rounds and the crowd immediately dispersed, leaving the street clear. However, seeing no further action being taken except a police cordon being placed round the armoured cars, the crowds began to collect again.

'A' Company of 2/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles that had been standing to since the previous day was immediately requisitioned, arriving at Kabuli gate at 11.25 am. It was soon relieved by two platoons of the 2nd Battalion, The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI) and proceeded to the Kacheri gate, a mile away, which had been allotted to the Garhwalis in the scheme. However, they had to double back to the Kabuli gate where the situation worsened, needing additional troops. On arrival at the Kabuli gate, the Garhwalis moved up behind the KOYLI, who were in support of the police facing the crowd of agitators. When the situation deteriorated, the senior police officer requested the company commander, Captain G.A. Ricketts, to move his men forward through the British troops, whose presence annoyed the crowd more than the Indian soldiers. As they reached their new position close behind the police, they came in contact with the mob and were greeted by a shower of stones and other missiles. Captain Ricketts was hit on the back of his head by a brick. Unlike the topis worn by British troops, the Garhwalis were wearing felt hats, which afforded little protection, resulting in serious injuries to many. Another factor that made them vulnerable was that they advanced with their rifles at 'high port', with their swords fixed and maintained this position when in contact with the mob. In this position, they were unable to offer any resistance when the crowd attacked, also risking the loss of their weapons. The 'on guard position' would have been more useful.⁴

The mob was soon reinforced and began to construct a barricade. They started throwing packing cases at the legs of the troops and gradually forced them back. The police officers tried to persuade them to disperse but failed.

At about 12.45 pm, the column reserve, which included the remainder of the battalion, less the Fort detachment, arrived at the Kabuli gate. The mob, which was reinforced by men armed with *lathis* and iron spiked poles, became more excited and continued throwing missiles including soda water bottles. An armoured car went forward and crashed through the barricade, driving back the crowd. The mob tried to cut off the armoured car but this was prevented by A Company, which moved forward to occupy the position, allowing the armoured car to pull back. This enraged the crowd, which vent their fury on the Garhwalis. The heavy boxes and crates fell with great force against the men and broke their formation. A man in the crowd seized a lance naik's rifle, while others hit him on the arms and head. He was then knocked over, when a crate landed on his chest and, as he fell backwards, his rifle was snatched from his hands and carried off. The jemadar commanding the platoon drew his revolver but was prevented from using it by one of the crowd, who grasped the pistol and prevented the chamber from revolving. Then, at about 1.30 pm, the crowd made a determined rush; the ranks were broken and many of them were forced back, forming up behind the KOYLI. As the line broke, the men fired three or four rounds, and at the same time the platoon commander managed to release his revolver and fired four times, killing two men. The armoured car and the KOYLI also opened fire and the mob ran back. Captain Ricketts, who had become unconscious when hit by a brick, and five other Garhwalis were admitted to hospital.

Meanwhile, the detachment at the Katcheri gate had also been kept busy by the hostile crowd, though no firing took place. The battalion was withdrawn from the city at 6.30 pm but remained under orders to turn out at short notice during the night. The General Officer Commanding Peshawar District complimented the Garhwalis for their steadiness during the day, in the face of heavy odds. The men, who were dazed and confused by the novelty of the situation, were not as quick as usual in acting on orders. However, they themselves were convinced that by maintaining a passive attitude towards

the mob, even in the face of grave provocation, they were loyally obeying the orders they had received.

On 24 April 1930, the battalion had one company 'standing to' from early morning. At about midday orders were received for the whole battalion, less the Fort detachment, to move to the city in lorries at 4 p.m. for a twenty-four hour tour of duty. Early in the afternoon, there was another incident that was to affect subsequent events. The subedar commanding No. 4 Platoon, who had been found negligent in his duties in connection with distribution of rations to his platoon earlier in the day, had his increment of pay delayed by six months by the commanding officer. Shortly before 4 pm, Lieutenant Colonel Walker left with the advance party, leaving instructions with Officer Commanding B Company to bring the battalion at the appointed hour. On being ordered to embus, No. 1 and 4 Platoons of A Company did not do so, some of the men stating that they wished to be discharged.

As soon as the commanding officer came to know of this incident, he decided to return to the lines. Meanwhile, officer commanding B Company was informed that the rest of the battalion, who had earlier embussed, had got out of their lorries and that Nos. 2 and 3 Platoons had gone towards the A Company lines. While the first part of the report – the battalion having debussed – was correct, the second part, about the men having moved towards A Company lines was unfounded. The reason for the men debussing was that it was extremely hot inside the lorries and the men only wanted to get into the shade on the side of the road. However, the act of debussing without permission was assumed to be on account of refusal to proceed for duty, in conformity with the actions of No. 1 and 4 Platoons. This, coupled with the report that the Garhwalis had not acted with normal vigour on the previous day, gave rise to the belief that the whole battalion was disaffected.

When the commanding officer was apprised of the situation on his return, he immediately issued orders for the battalion to dismiss and return their rifles to the *kotes* (armouries). Nos. 1 and 4 Platoons were initially unwilling to march to the *kotes*, but were later persuaded to do so. Except

for this, the rest of the battalion returned their weapons in the normal manner and went back to their lines. At about 6 pm, the commanding officer met the district commander, who gave orders for the battalion to be disarmed and moved to Abbotabad. After hurried preparations during the night, the battalion entrained for Havelian, from where they would march to Abbotabad. Both 1 and 4 Platoons were sent to Kakul. While packing for the move, loading and unloading and the ten-mile march from Havelian, the men showed utmost keenness and enthusiasm to comply with all orders. The commander of the Abbotabad Brigade, who was at Havelian to receive the battalion, watched them detraining before introducing himself to the commanding officer or going near the unit. He was highly impressed by the marked discipline and orderly work of all ranks. In his report he wrote: "I could not have wished to see a better example of how a battalion should work. It seemed that such smart and soldierly men could not possibly have been mixed up in an incident".⁵

A Court of Enquiry comprising four officers was ordered to investigate the occurrences on 23 and 24 April 1930. As regards the events that occurred on 23 April, the members felt that the conduct of the battalion as a whole during the day was above reproach. They were emphatic that the forbearance shown by A Company in the city on 23 April was not due to unwillingness to act against the mob, but was because the men, despite all provocations, were adhering to the orders they had received. In its opinion, the Court of Enquiry recorded:

The men concerned were called on to suffer very demoralising and degrading treatment at the hands of a savage mob, in that they for a period between one and two hours were subjected to treatment no soldier wearing The King's uniform should be asked to stand without retaliation. They were made to stand in closest contact with a raging mob, subjected to a hail of missiles and being struck with staves and iron shod poles. Though their British officer and several comrades were wounded, yet no order to retaliate was received by these dumb-founded soldiers. They were acting on the strictest orders

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not to take offensive action without a direct order from a British officer or a magistrate. These orders had been instilled into them for the previous three of four days under instructions received from the civil authorities.

Their provocations were long and great. They had their British officer severely wounded, six men admitted to hospital and ten who had to attend for treatment of their injuries. Not until Government property was in jeopardy i.e. a rifle was forcibly wrenched from them, did they fire on their own initiative. This incident synchronized with their ranks being forced and a backward movement to recover their formation.

As a record of high discipline and devotion to their duty, as understood by them, the action of the 2/18th Royal Garhwal Rifles on the 23rd April, the Court considers, hard to beat.⁶

The Government of India endorsed the opinion of the Court of Enquiry. Later, in their remarks on the “Peshawar Riots Committee Report” the Government of India noted: “The situation in which troops were placed for some time previous to the second firing, emphasizes the difficulties and dangers, which are likely to occur through non-observance of the accepted principle that troops should not be brought in close physical contact with a violent and hostile mob.”

As regards the ‘mutiny’ that took place on 24 April, the Court of Enquiry concluded that the trouble was confined to the non commissioned officers and men of 1 and 4 Platoons and no Garhwali officer was involved. (At that time, the viceroy’s commissioned officers, now known as junior commissioned officers, in the Garhwal Rifles were called Garhwali officers. A similar practice was followed in the Gurkha Rifles). They named two non-commissioned officers as instigators of the trouble, which must have been actuated by some influence outside the battalion, though there was no evidence to back this view. They were of the opinion that the treatment the two platoons had undergone on the 23 and 24 April gave the ringleaders the opportunity of inciting the men to disobey orders.

The “Opinion” of the Court of Enquiry clearly brought out the fact that the men’s disinclination to act against the mob was attributable to the orders they had received. It also became obvious that only two platoons were involved in the incident on 24 April when they refused to embus for duty. However, the enquiry had several anomalies. Firstly, there was no evidence to show that any outside influence was responsible for the trouble in the battalion; secondly, the two platoons that had been gravely misused in the city on 23 April were Nos. 2 and 3, whereas the platoons that refused to embus on 24 April were Nos. 1 and 4; and thirdly, the conclusion that no Garhwali officer was involved was incorrect, as evidence to the contrary soon came to light.

Exhaustive enquiries by the Criminal Investigation Department, the army and the police in Peshawar, Abbotabad and several other places showed clearly that neither of the two non commissioned officers of No. 4 platoon blamed by the enquiry nor any other in the battalion had any contact with any political body, nor was there any evidence of outside subversive influence. The true story was revealed after independent investigations within the battalion, which were completed before the police report was received, followed by the confession of the subedar of No. 4 Platoon, who turned out to be the real instigator of the episode. This subedar had long nursed a grievance for the unfair treatment he considered he had received from a senior officer of the battalion. He particularly resented the punishment he was awarded on 24 April, for which he felt the senior officer was responsible. Impelled either by a desire to exact revenge or to display his influence over the men, he engineered the whole incident and induced the men not to obey orders and to demand their discharge. Neither he nor the men involved had imagined that the scheme would turn into a fiasco, with serious consequences for everyone. ⁷

The non-commissioned officers of Nos. 1 and 4 Platoons were tried by a general court martial and sentenced to dismissal and terms of imprisonment varying from penal servitude for life to three years rigorous imprisonment. One of them later joined politics and became a nationalist leader. This was later cited as proof of the incident being influenced by outside nationalist

elements by some writers, including Lawrence James, who writes: “The refusal to perform crowd control duties by a detachment of Garhwalis in 1930 was publicly explained as the consequences of regimental problems. Yet, the Garhwali ringleader, on his release from jail, became an active Indian nationalist.” However, this conclusion does not appear to be correct. In all probability, the non commissioned officer concerned, after undergoing his term of imprisonment, decided to go into politics in order to seek redress for the injustice done to him. The view expressed by General Sir James Wilcocks, who commanded the Indian Corps in France in World War I and had forty years experience of commanding Indian troops, including the then 39th Garhwalis, is nearer the truth. According to him, “Indians of all classes are of any people I know the easiest led when the leader understands their hearts, and the most difficult to manage when he does not.”⁸

The riflemen of both platoons were dismissed from service, under orders of the Brigade Commander. On 17 May 1930, the commandeer-in-chief in India issued orders for the battalion, less two platoons, to resume its normal duties. Ten days later, Lieutenant Colonel G.R. Mainwaring was posted as the commanding officer, relieving Lieutenant Colonel C.C. Walker, who was posted to another appointment. A month later, the battalion was sent out to Oghi in an emergency column, and subsequently to Razmak for operations against the Mahsuds. During the remainder of its stay on the frontier the battalion performed well and by the time it returned to Lansdowne in December 1932, it had redeemed its reputation in the eyes of the authorities.

The events at Peshawar had several other fallouts. It was ten days before the city was fully under control, after a Gurkha battalion was brought in to replace the Garhwalis. The unrest spread to several other towns on the frontier, and the tribesmen beyond the border, thinking that British authority was collapsing, made incursions into the province with the help of local inhabitants, They were dispersed with difficulty, but the province remained disturbed, and in August 1930, after a further incursion into the

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Peshawar district by Afridis, the government declared martial law that remained in force till January 1931. The Peshawar incident also forced the Government of India to rethink its policy regarding the Civil Disobedience Movement. Some of the provincial governments were of the opinion that Mahatma Gandhi should continue to be left alone and the movement allowed to peter out. However, the Bombay government reported that they had information that Gandhi was planning to step up the salt campaign by organizing non-violent raids on salt depots, which could be prevented only by ordering his arrest. The military authorities also favoured his arrest, arguing that the Garhwal Rifles incident could contaminate the armed forces if the movement was allowed to run on and no decisive action was taken to end it. On 5 May 1930, Gandhi was quietly arrested and without any trial, sent to Yervada jail near Poona, invoking an ancient regulation of 1827 to detain him.⁹

Though the ‘mutiny’ in the 2/18 Royal Garhwal Rifles in 1930 at Peshawar was relatively minor, it was taken very seriously by the authorities due to an apprehension that it was inspired by outside nationalist elements. This was primarily due the timing and location - the incident occurred soon after the commencement of the Civil Disobedience Movement and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan was present in Peshawar at that time. The incident had far reaching consequences, compelling the British authorities to rethink their policy in India. For the first time after 1857, doubts were expressed about the trustworthiness of Indian troops, as a result of influence nationalist movements in India.

Notes

This chapter is largely based on Sir Penderel Moon’s *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (London, 1989); and Lt Gen. Sir Ralph B. Deedes’ *Historical Records of the Royal Garhwal Rifles, Vol. II, 1923-1947* (New Delhi, 1962). Specific references are given below:

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1. Penderel Moon, *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (London, 1989), p. 913.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 1041.
3. Lt Gen. Sir Ralph B. Deedes, *Historical Records of the Royal Garhwal Rifles, Vol. II, 1923-1947* (New Delhi, 1962), p.16 .
4. Deedes *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
8. Lt Gen S.L. Menezes, *Fidelity and Honour* (New Delhi, 1993), p.333.
9. Moon, note 1, p. 1042.

6

Mutinies And Revolts During World War II

Mutinies occur in all armies, and the Indian Army during the British Raj was no exception. However, it has been noticed that during times of war, cases of mutiny actually reduce, while those of desertion by individual soldiers increase. There were several mutinies during the two World Wars, but none so serious as to affect the conduct or performance of the army as a whole. During World War I, the Ghadar Party planned to create large scale disturbances in India, inciting Indian troops to revolt against British rule. Between 7,000 and 8,000 Ghadriles were sent to India for this purpose. However, the Ghadriles paid scant heed to secrecy and surprise, resulting in most of them being caught by British intelligence. The only two mutinies that occurred during World War I were a minor revolt in the 130th Baluch Regiment at Rangoon, and a more serious one in the 5th Light Infantry at Singapore, which has been described in Chapter 5.

The mutinies during World War II are covered in this chapter. The unique feature about these mutinies is the fact that all of them involved Sikh troops. During World War I also, the Sikhs formed the largest complement of the Ghadriles. However, the Sikhs in the Army remained loyal, and it was the Muslims who revolted, due to their reluctance to fight the Turks. During World War II, the Muslims remained loyal, while it was the Sikhs who revolted, mostly due to political influences and from

fear of being sidelined by the Muslims, who were bent upon getting a separate homeland in the Punjab. The mutinies covered in this chapter are the RIASC (Royal Indian Service Corps) Mutiny of 1940; the CIH (Central India Horse) Mutiny of 1940; the Hong Kong Mutiny of 1941 and the Christmas Island Mutiny of 1942. Though the Hong Kong mutiny occurred in a Royal Artillery unit, it has been mentioned briefly because it involved Sikh troops.

Soon after the commencement of World War II, the 4th Indian Division was moved to Egypt. The divisional headquarters was located at Mena near the Pyramids, with administrative elements including the divisional RIASC at El Rebiqi, a short distance away. The commander RIASC was Lieutenant Colonel J.J. O' Brien, with the Ammunition, Supply and MT Companies being commanded by Majors T.N. Shelton, F. Oliffe and E.C.T Mitchley respectively.

Towards the end of January 1940, it was discovered that a large number of RIASC personnel were disaffected and were resorting to "go slow" tactics while performing their duties. Out of over 300 such men who were classified as "passive resisters", 92 were tried summarily by Major Mitchley on 1 February 1940 and awarded rigorous imprisonment ranging from 14 to 28 days. The same day, 64 Sikhs refused to go on parade, which included almost all the Sikhs in the Ammunition Company (37 out of 39). The men refused to load stores, saying that they were not "coolies". The matter was reported to the Commander RIASC who conveyed to the company commanders information received from the CID that certain subversive influences had been reported in the unit. He ordered that no action was to be taken immediately but the men should be watched carefully. At a parade held next morning the number of Sikhs who refused to fall in fell from 64 to 51.

Colonel O' Brien reported the matter to the divisional headquarters, recommending that the men who had refused to load stores should be tried by court martial, with rest being dealt with summarily in the unit. On 3 February, some additional information regarding subversive influences

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was received from the CID. During the next two days, the remaining “passive resisters” were summarily tried and a few of those who were politically motivated sent away to other locations. A Summary General Court Martial held from 16 to 22 February, tried 36 men for refusing to load stores. All of them were found guilty and sentenced to seven years transportation. Subsequently, the sentences of two were commuted to five years rigorous imprisonment.

In order to weed out the Sikhs who were still disaffected, tests were carried out over the next few days, by ordering the men to load, in batches. In addition to the 36 who had been court martialled earlier, 19 men who continued to refuse were tried and sentenced to one year rigorous imprisonment. Another 29 who had earlier refused to go on parade were released from service, along with 15 who were considered undesirable. Based on the recommendation of the commander RIASC, divisional headquarters issued orders that the term ‘loader’ would not be used henceforth, the men in question being called spare drivers.¹

The Central India Horse had moved from Jhansi to Bolarum, near Secunderabad in November 1939, shortly after World War II started. Before moving, the regiment had been ‘mechanised’, handing over its horses to the relieving unit, Hodson’s Horse. After its arrival at Bolarum the regiment got busy with its new role, and spent most of its time getting used to its new mounts; the ‘A’ vehicles were 15-cwt. (cwt. is the abbreviation for hundredweight, which equals 112 pounds) Ford trucks and ‘B’ vehicles comprised 30-cwt. Chevrolet lorries. In June the second-in-command, Major J.G. Pocock was promoted and assumed command of the regiment, after the departure of Lieutenant Colonel D. St. V. Gordon, who was sick. Major R. George now became the Second-in-Command. The three squadrons of the regiment—A, B and— comprised Muslims, Sikhs and Jats respectively.

In early July 1940, the regiment received mobilisation orders. Entraining on 14 July, the unit reached Alexandra Docks in Bombay on the morning of

16 July. The ship on which they were to sail had still not arrived, and was expected only in the afternoon. The regiment was asked to stay in the train until embarkation which was scheduled for 18 July. It rained continuously throughout the day and the men had to stay in their carriages. On the morning of 17 July, Risaldar Kartar Singh of 'B' Squadron reported to the squadron leader that four men in the squadron were spreading propaganda amongst the other Sikhs. The squadron leader decided to isolate the men unobtrusively and detailed them for a guard on board the ship. However, the men refused to fall in for the guard. Soon afterwards, the majority of the men in 'B' Squadron came out of the train and announced that they would not embark. The mutiny in the Sikh squadron of the Central India Horse had begun.

The matter was immediately reported to the commanding officer, who subsequently informed the higher authorities. For several hours, the Indian and British officers of the regiment tried to persuade the men to change their minds. Subsequently the area commander and the district commander also addressed the men, but they remained adamant. Finally, each man was ordered individually by name to embark. Altogether 108 Sikhs, or nearly two-thirds of all the Sikhs in the regiment, refused to obey the order and were placed under arrest. By the evening of 17 July, the arrested men had been removed and the rest of the regiment, including over 60 Sikhs, mostly from the Headquarters Squadron which was not affected, prepared to embark the next day. But on the morning of 18 July orders were received that none of the Sikhs would embark. The Sikh squadron was replaced by a Dogra squadron and it was therefore decided to replace the Sikhs in the headquarters squadron also by Dogras. The regiment sailed on 18 July, without any Sikhs on board. The 108 Sikh mutineers were court martialled. Four were executed, 100 transported and four were imprisoned.

The mutiny in the Central India Horse was sudden and took everyone by surprise. The men who refused to embark stated that they had no grievance against their officers, conditions of service or the government –

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their objection was only to serve abroad. The Sikh officers of the unit were sure that the mutiny was unpremeditated and would not have occurred if the men had not had to spend over 24 hours sitting in the train. It was during this period that the ringleaders were able to convince them that if they embarked they would never see their wives and children again. It was subsequently ascertained that during the previous summer the chief ringleader had joined a revolutionary society in Meerut whose aim was to cause maximum inconvenience to the British. This man later perverted three others to join him as ringleaders. ²

Khushwant Singh, in his seminal work, *History of the Sikhs*, has discussed the reasons for the disaffection among Sikhs in the army. He writes:

Communists, who had acquired influence in the central districts (of the Punjab) adhered to the party line regarding the war in Europe as Imperialist: their agents busied themselves disseminating anti-war propaganda among Sikh soldiers. The Akalis, who mattered more than all the other parties put together, were the most confused. Their leaders, most of whom had served long terms of imprisonment during the gurdwara agitation had little love for the British. They were equally hostile to the Muslim Leaguers and to the pro-British Unionists. But they wished to preserve the numerical strength of the Sikhs in the armed services so that when the day of reckoning came, the Khalsa would have an army of its own. The Akali Party agreed to help the government and pressed for more Sikh recruitment; at the same time...the unenthusiastic support of the Alkalis and the antagonism of the Communists during the 'imperialist' phase of the war was reflected in the reluctance of the Sikh peasants to enlist and disaffection in some regiments."³

Chevenix-Trench, an Indian Cavalry officer though of a different regiment, felt that "the Sikhs had been 'got at' by persons warning them of a nefarious British plot to have them exterminated so that the Punjab would be ruled by Moslems."⁴

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The British authorities had been aware of the activities of Sikh religious movements since long. In his book *Handbooks for the Indian Army – Sikhs* published in 1928, Major (later Brigadier) A.E. Barstow had cautioned:

... the “Kirti” movement recently organized by Sikh agitators in the Doaba tract should be carefully watched and Jat Sikhs who supply recruits to for the Army should be warned in time to beware of the pitfalls. The “Kirti” movement is a part of a conspiracy against the State which has been conducted since 1923 when the Akali agitation and Jatha activities were most intense by a number of disaffected Sikhs in India sent in certain foreign countries. Their proposals included the formation of secret societies for revolutionary work under cover of religious or communal organisations..... A sum of Rs. 10,000 was received from the Kabul party with the object of setting up a press and in February the first issue of the publication appeared. In its contents it was explicit in the expression of its revolutionary aims, and has persistently advocated the cause and ideals of the Indian Ghadrtees of 1914 and 1915 and has persistently glorified the Babbar Akalis as martyrs and heroes. The activities of the members have been potentially dangerous rather than actually dangerous and they have openly preached communistic doctrines. The Punjab “Kirti” party has become formally affiliated to the Communist party, but their capacity for danger is at present restricted by the limitation of the leaders of the moment. The organisation is however, undoubtedly a real danger. Given a genuine agrarian grievance, it could do great harm.⁵

Unfortunately, the warning contained in Barstow’s book was not taken seriously by the British authorities. This appears strange, since Barstow’s assessment was part of an official publication, which was used as a reference book by officers posted to units having Sikh troops. Barstow had served with the Sikhs for many years, and his views must certainly have been seen and approved by senior officers before being cleared for publication.

Mutinies And Revolts During World War II

The 12th Heavy Regiment of Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery was stationed in Hong Kong. Though it was a British unit, it had a large number of Sikhs, who had been enrolled in the garrison artillery since the previous century. The political influences that had caused the mutinies in the RIASC in Egypt and the Central India Horse at Bombay had also affected the Sikhs at Hong Kong. However, the trigger for the mutiny that occurred in January 1941 was an order making it compulsory for all troops to wear helmets. The Sikhs objected to the order that went against their religious beliefs, which mandated the wearing of a turban. However, the authorities did not listen, on the plea that the order was applicable for the entire garrison. A similar order had been issued in France during World War I, but had been rescinded after the extent of resentment among Sikh troops became clear. Finding their pleas being ignored, the Sikhs mutinied. After the mutiny had been subdued, 84 Sikhs were court martialled and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. ⁶

The Christmas Island is located about 400 km south of the western extremity of Java in the Indian Ocean. In March 1942, a detachment of Sikhs of the 7th Coast Guard Regiment, Hong Kong and Singapore Royal Artillery was stationed on the island. The strength of the detachment was one viceroy's commissioned officer, four British non-commissioned officers and 27 Indian other ranks. The detachment commander was Captain Williams, Royal Artillery. The settlement was administered by the District Officer, Mr. Cromwell, who had a small complement of Sikh policemen to assist him. Due to the wartime conditions, Captain Williams was in overall control.

At about 6 am, on 7 March 1942, the island was shelled by a Japanese naval force. The crew of the 6-inch gun left their posts and went into the jungle. Realising that resistance was useless, Williams ordered the white flag to be hoisted. He also ordered the gun to be dismantled and the weapons of the detachment to be withdrawn, except his own pistol and that of his Subedar. However, the Japanese did not land. After waiting for three days,

Williams ordered the Union Jack to be rehoisted, hoping to attract an Allied ship that could rescue them. The gun was reassembled but the men's arms remained locked up. This caused some resentment among the Sikh gunners and the policemen.

On 10 March, about ten men broke open the stores and armed themselves with rifles. The mutineers placed two Lewis guns facing the quarters of the British Other Ranks. Captain Williams and the four British non-commissioned officers were killed and their bodies thrown in the sea. Next morning, the district officer, who had heard the shots, went to the Fort to investigate. He found that the Sikh policemen had joined the mutineers, who were all armed with rifles. A few days later, the Japanese landed on the island and learned of the murder of the British personnel. Asking the detachment to fall in, the Japanese asked: "Who are the brave fellows who have killed the British?" Nine men stepped forward.

After the surrender of Japan, seven Indian gunners were rounded up in the Netherlands East Indies. They were tried by a general court martial in Singapore in December 1946. After a trial lasting three months, one was acquitted, one awarded two years rigorous imprisonment and five sentenced to death. After independence, based on representations from the Governments of India and Pakistan, the king commuted the death sentences to penal servitude for life.⁷

The British authorities were bewildered by the mutinies among the Sikhs, who had performed so magnificently during World War I. Not willing to take further risks, they imposed a temporary ban on the enrolment of Sikhs. Acting on a suggestion of the Secretary of the Defence Ministry, Sir Charles O'Gilly, the government set up an enquiry commission to go into the causes of the disaffection among the Sikhs. It consisted of officers well acquainted with the Sikhs; Brigadier General A.E Barstow (Chairman); Major A.J.M. Kilroy, 36th Sikhs; Major A.E. Farwell, Ludhiana Sikhs; Major 'Billy' Short, 47th Sikhs and Captain Niranjjan Singh Gill, who later joined the Indian National Army. Members of the commission individually

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toured Sikh districts and discussed the difficulties of soldiers with retired officers. They also held meetings with political leaders.⁸

The commission found evidence of “Kirti” and Communist infiltration, and a sense of uneasiness concerning the Unionist Party Ministry’s alignment with the Muslim League, which had begun to talk of a Muslim state in the Punjab. The Sikh grievances were redressed – assurances were given that Sikh interest would not be sacrificed to appease the Muslims, and Sardar Baldev Singh (the future defence minister) was appointed a minister in the Unionist Party Ministry. The ban on enrolment of Sikhs was lifted, and a Khalsa Defence of India League was organised under the chairmanship of the Maharaja of Patiala, to step up the resumed Sikh recruitment. The Sikh community quickly realised what a loss it would be if either the British continued to curtail recruitment, or if Sikh recruits were not forthcoming in response to the British call. ⁹

Notes

This chapter is largely based on Brigadier A. A. Filose’s *King George V’s Own Central India Horse – Volume II of the Regimental History* (Edinburgh, William Blackwood & Sons, 1950); Khushwant Singh’s *History of the Sikhs* (Delhi, OUP, 1991); Major A.E. Barstow’s *Handbooks for the Indian Army – Sikhs* (Calcutta: Government Press, 1928); Lt. Gen S.L. Menezes’, *Fidelity & Honour* (New Delhi, 1993); and War Diary, HQ 4th Indian Division RIASC (Ministry of Defence, History Division, New Delhi). Specific references are given below:

1. War Diary, HQ 4th Indian Division RIASC, Ministry of Defence, History Division, (MODHD), New Delhi,
2. Brigadier A. A. Filose, *King George V’s Own Central India Horse – Volume II of the Regimental History* (Edinburgh, William Blackwood & Sons, 1950), pp.210-213.
3. Khushwant Singh, *History of the Sikhs* (Delhi, OUP, 1991), Vol. 2. p. 240.
4. Lt. Gen S.L. Menezes, *Fidelity and Honour* (New Delhi, 1993), p. 348, quoting

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- C. Chevenix-Trench, *The Indian Army and The King's Enemies - 1900-1947* (London, Hutchinson, 1988), p.137.
5. Major A.E. Barstow, *Handbooks for the Indian Army – Sikhs* (Calcutta: Government Press, 1928), p.55.
 6. Menezes, note 4, p.349.
 7. The Christmas Island Mutiny, MODHD, New Delhi.
 8. Singh, note 3, p. 241.
 9. Menezes, note 4, p.349.

7

The Air Force Mutiny - 1946

The mutiny in the RIAF (Royal Indian Air Force) occurred at almost the same time as the more serious uprisings in the RIN (Royal Indian Navy) and army units at Jubbulpore in February 1946. Many historians prefer to call it a strike rather than a mutiny, since there was no violence and neither was any one punished. However, the term 'strike' is seldom used in the armed forces, collective disobedience always being called a mutiny, irrespective of the number of persons involved and the gravity of the insubordination. Though they occurred at almost the same time, the trouble in the RIAF was quite different from the insurrection that occurred in the other two services. While the disturbances in the army and the RIN were confined to Indian soldiers and sailors, the unrest in the RIAF was induced by 'strikes' by British airmen of the RAF (Royal Air Force). Since no disciplinary action was taken against the British airmen, the authorities had to take a lenient view of the indiscipline by Indian airmen also. Unlike the uprisings in the navy and the army that had some nationalistic element, the demands of the RIAF personnel related mostly to pay, rations and travel concessions.

Though the RIAF mutiny was controlled without the use of force, it had far reaching implications. The Indian Air Force—the prefix Royal was added only in 1943— was just six years old when World War II began, undergoing a ten-fold increase in size by the time it ended. Though still minuscule compared to the Indian Army, it was a potent force that could no longer be ignored. Coupled with the more serious incidents in the other two armed

forces, it reinforced the perception of the British authorities that the Indian troops could no longer be relied upon to maintain Britain's hold over India. This necessitated a serious review of British policy, leading ultimately to the decision to pull out of India.

Three Indian pilots held commissions in the Royal Air Force (RAF) during World War I, fighting with great gallantry. They were Lieutenant H.S Malik, 2nd Lieutenant E.S.C. Sen and Lieutenant Indra Lal Roy. Sen was shot down over Germany and became a prisoner of war, while Roy was killed in air combat in July 1918. It was only in 1930 that a decision was taken to establish an air force in India. Officers selected as pilots were sent to Cranwell in UK for training, while the ground staff, recruited as *hawai sepoys* (air soldiers) were trained in India. The first batch of five Indians commissioned as pilot officers comprised Sircar, Subroto Mukerjee, Bhupinder Singh, A Singh and AD Dewan. The IAF (Indian Air Force) formally came into being on 1 April 1933, when the first Indianised squadron – No. 1 Squadron - was formed at Karachi, exactly 15 years after the creation of the RAF.¹

Shortly after the outbreak of World War II, it was decided to form the IAFVR (Indian Air Force Volunteer Reserve) to take over the task of coastal defence from the RAF. Following the commencement of the Japanese offensive in Southeast Asia in December 1941, a flight of the IAFVR was flown to Moulmein to carry out anti-submarine and convoy protection operations. After the capture of Moulmein by Japanese forces, No. 3 IAFVR Squadron was sent to Rangoon for reconnaissance and convoy protection duties. As British forces withdrew in the face of the relentless Japanese offensive, No. 1 Squadron arrived at Toungoo, where they were subjected to raids by the Japanese Air Force on the first day itself. During the next two days, Squadron Leader K.K. 'Jumbo' Majumdar led the whole squadron on raids against the Japanese base at Mehingson inflicting severe damage and earning a great moral victory. The exploit not only made Majumdar a hero overnight but also enhanced the reputation of the fledgling IAF in its first major operation during the war. In view of its splendid performance during

the war, the IAF was given the prefix “Royal” on its tenth anniversary, becoming the RIAF (Royal Indian Air Force) on 1 April 1943.

From one squadron in 1939, the IAF had grown to three by the beginning of 1942, the year which saw the greatest expansion in its size. By the end of 1942, it had seven squadrons; during the next year, another two were added, bringing its strength to nine squadrons by the beginning of 1944. The number of personnel had increased correspondingly, from 16 officers and 269 airmen at the beginning of the war to 1,200 officers and over 20,000 trained airmen, with another 6,000 undergoing training, besides about 2,000 followers. In the early years of the war, 20 Indian pilots had been sent to the UK to help the RAF, which had run perilously short of pilots during the Battle of Britain. These Indian pilots served in RAF squadrons and did sterling work during the critical months, carrying out fighter sweeps over France and escorting bombers. Seven Indian pilots were killed in operations, the remainder returning to India in mid 1942. One of the pilots who returned from the German front with a DFC was K.K. Majumdar, who later died in an air crash at Lahore in February 1945.²

While World War I lasted four years, World War II continued for six years. When it ended in 1945, everyone was weary and drained out. Many of the participants had been away from their homes for several years and were eagerly looking forward to a reunion with their families. Demobilisation began soon after the end of the war, but the sheer numbers of servicemen, especially from the USA and UK, made the process slow and time consuming. Hundreds of thousands of troops were literally doing nothing, waiting for ships to take them home from remote and inhospitable corners of the globe. The wait seemed interminable, and most men were unable to comprehend the reasons for the delay in sending them home. Coupled with the delay in repatriation, another major problem was the uncertain future that most of the men faced. Resettlement and rehabilitation measures obviously could not cater for all the servicemen, who knew that they would have to fend for themselves. War-time industries that employed millions of workers were

closing down, and most of the men shedding uniforms had neither the training nor the experience for the new enterprises that were coming up.

The first sign of unrest came from American troops based in Germany who held mass parades to demand speedier demobilisation and repatriation. These parades were given wide publicity on the American forces radio programmes that were very popular and eagerly heard by servicemen all over the world. Similar demonstrations by American soldiers in Calcutta could not leave British troops serving in Southeast Asia unaffected and it was only a matter of time before the virus spread to other stations. Apart from the logistics, another reason for the slow rate of demobilisation of British servicemen was the uncertainty about the future of British rule in India. As late as June 1946, the Chiefs of Staff in London were still considering various options, one of which was to continue British rule in India, for which seven additional divisions would be needed. This would naturally result in suspending the process of demobilisation, with serious implications, especially the effect on morale.³

Taking a cue from the Americans, British airmen at the RAF base at Mauripur refused to join duty on 22 January 1946. The Inspector General of the RAF, Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Barratt, who was on tour in Southeast Asia, and was passing through Mauripur at the time, held a meeting with the men to ascertain their grievances. The men had many complaints, most of which were related to aspects of demobilisation that could only be dealt with at a higher level by the Cabinet or the Air Ministry. One such grievance was, "why is RAF demobilisation so slow compared with that in the army and the navy?" Air Chief Marshal Barratt explained that practically all the points raised by the men had been explained in the demobilisation forms which were a part of the release scheme and kept the personnel fully in the picture, explaining the reasons for the various actions taken, especially with regard to the release under classes 'B' and 'C'.

The men were not satisfied and demanded that a parliamentary representative should visit them so that they could impress upon him, and he on Parliament, their feelings about the slow speed of demobilisation. A

parliamentary delegation was then in India and they asked that it should visit Mauripur. Air Chief Marshal Barratt assured the men that he would forward their demands to Air Ministry and would be obtained under threat and urged them to return to duty. The meeting ended with no promises made. The air officer commanding 229 Group stated that he would be able to get the men back to work that afternoon. After making his report to the Air Ministry, the inspector general proceeded on his pre-arranged tour programme. The situation remained unchanged in the evening. Many of the men showed an inclination to join duty but appeared to be fearful of rough treatment at the hands of others.

In his report to the Air Ministry, Air Chief Marshal Barratt had mentioned all their grievances, asking for a reply to be sent to the air officer commanding India. As regards the demand for the Parliamentary delegation already in India to visit Mauripur, he felt that the delegation was visiting parts of the Commonwealth for an entirely different purpose and it would not be wise to permit the members to address the men, as they were not well versed in the intricacies of the demobilisation policy of the government and did not understand the feelings of the personnel in Southeast Asia. However, it was possible for Mr Harold Davies, the member of parliament (MP) for Leek, who was visiting Southeast Asia, to meet the airmen. Mr Davies had already visited units in India, Burma and Malaya in order to keep the men in touch with the new government's policy and, during his tour, had spoken to hundreds of servicemen.⁴

News of the strike at Mauripur soon spread to Ceylon, the first unit being affected being at Negombo, where the personnel of No. 32 Staging Post refused to carryout servicing of aircraft. The morning York service from Mauripur on 23 January 1946 was serviced by the aircrew themselves, giving an indication that something was amiss. As at Mauripur, the major complaint was that of slow demobilisation, the other grievances being bad administration and lack of sports facilities and entertainment. The men felt that personnel of the Fleet Air Arm should be drafted into the RAF to assist

with key trades, and expedite the RAF release. Another cause for complaint was that RAF airmen were being asked to work on BOAC and Qantas aircraft. The men felt that this had two effects: firstly, that the air passage of civilians was delaying release of servicemen and secondly, that the employment of airmen was incorrectly providing aviation companies with cheap labour.

The Air Officer Commanding, Air Commodore Chilton was on his way to the Cocos Islands when he received news of the strike. He returned to Negombo and talked to the men, promising to remedy the local problems straightaway. As regards the drafting of personnel of the Fleet Air Arm, speeding up demobilisation and servicing of civilian aircraft, he assured them that these would be forwarded to the Air Ministry. With the resolution of grievances concerning administration, sports facilities and entertainment, it was hoped that the men would resume duty on the following day. Air Commodore Chilton decided to continue his flight since the news of the Negombo incident had reached 129 Staging Post in the Cocos Islands where it was understood that the airmen intended taking similar action.

However, on his arrival at the Cocos Islands, he found the station running smoothly, with no sign of trouble. While he was visiting the station he received a signal asking him to return to Negombo where the situation had deteriorated. The stoppage of work by the airmen had spread from the staging post to the rest of the station, including the Communication and Meteorological Flights. The men were well behaved but adamant. The air officer commanding tried to convince the men that no good would come of their strike irrespective of what was happening in India. The men continued to complain of the delays regarding repatriation and mails. It was pointed out that by refusing to work they would delay their release and mails even more. Releases were governed by the Manpower Committee in London and the local RAF authorities could do little more than forward the complaints to the Air Ministry.

By this time, the disaffection had spread and by 26 January airmen at Koggala, Ratmalana and Colombo were also involved. It was apparent from

reports received from various units that broadcasts made by the BBC on 24 and 25 January were largely responsible for the information reaching them, bringing out feelings that were dormant and encouraging them to emulate their colleagues who had joined the strike. Except at Negombo where the relations between the station and staging post were not easy, at other stations, the unit commanders and officers were in close touch with the men, addressing them at the first sign of trouble. However, the problems concerning repatriation and release could not be solved by them on their own, though every effort was made to take the men into confidence and explain the policy in this regard. Many of the grievances, such as disparity in releases compared to RAF personnel in the UK and faster repatriation of personnel of the navy and army were unfounded.

Meanwhile, the strikes in RAF stations in India continued to spread. On 26 January 1946, Air Marshal Sir Roderick Carr, air officer commanding, British Air Forces in Southeast Asia, sent a signal to the Air Ministry giving details of the stoppage of work that had occurred at Palam, Dum Dum, Poona, Cawnpore and Vizagapatnam, in addition to Mauripur. Except at Mauripur, all stoppages were of short duration but it was considered that other units were likely to be affected. The majority of units were 'striking' in an orderly and respectful manner in order to register a protest against the government's policy, and then returning to work. Air Marshal Carr considered that unless the government shouldered the responsibility of making a comprehensive statement, even if that statement did not meet the airmen's requirements, he anticipated that the men would strike again. Units that had returned to work had done so on the assumption that their dissatisfaction with the demobilisation policy had been presented to the government from which they were expecting a comprehensive statement. No promises were made, but the men had been informed that the questions raised in the inspector general's report had been forwarded to the secretary of state. In conclusion, Air Marshal Carr stressed that he saw no alternative to a government statement. While he agreed that the government should not be called upon

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to issue a general statement as a concession to indiscipline, he felt that in this instance, failure to do so it may have serious consequences.

The stoppage of work on RAF stations in India influenced the personnel of the RIAF also. Reports of men staying away from work were received from Trichinopoly and No. 228 Group. The main cause of discontent - demobilisation - was augmented by complaints regarding leave, food and family allowances. In addition to speeding up their release, the Indian airmen requested that family and ration allowances should be paid to them while on leave. They maintained that granting only one free rail warrant per annum meant hardship to airmen who had to split their leave in two or three parts. They requested that either additional railway warrants should be given or permission granted to avail their entire leave at one time during the year.

The strikes in the RIAF alarmed the authorities, since they could have an adverse effect on the political situation in the country. The Air Marshal Commanding, British Air Forces in South East Asia sent a signal to all RAF units informing them of this. The signal, which was not sent to RIAF units, read:

The Government plan for demobilization must be a balanced one: our industries at home require manpower, but this cannot be provided at the risk of endangering the safety of the World. There are still defence problems in India. The public press has recently made it clear that a political crisis is approaching, a crisis which may only be solved by little short of civil war. If you wish, you may quote me as authority for this. The Government at Home are now fully aware that conscripts in the RAF have little or no pride in their service. I do not believe that these misguided airmen who took part in the recent so-called strikes appreciate that their action may be endangering the safety of India. Already their example has been followed by the RIAF. Such actions can only encourage civil disturbances and may lead to grave consequences for everyone in India including those airmen who are not due for repatriation in the near future.⁵

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The Allied Air Commander-in-Chief, Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park was also concerned by the RIAF strikes. He signalled all commanders in Southeast Asia, stressing that it was essential that pay and allowances and other conditions of service in the post-war Indian Air Force should be made known to all concerned, with the least possible delay. The Government of India had set up a committee to examine and make recommendations on the terms and conditions of service to be applied to the post war Indian forces, including the air force. The work of the committee would be hastened with due regard to the necessity of arriving at a well considered conclusion. The message continued:

I have collected from various sources a full list of the grievances of the Royal Indian Air Force airmen and will do everything in my power to have them investigated. To do this thoroughly will take time. I must make it clear to all concerned that I cannot condone the serious breaches of discipline that have taken place during the last twelve days, and any improvement in conditions that I may be able to make will not, repeat, not be a concession to discipline. I will always accept honest complaints if passed to me through the correct channels. I would like to assure both officers and other ranks personnel who desire to continue in the service that the Royal Indian Air Force offers a fine career to the right man.

Meanwhile, the strikes in RAF stations continued to spread, with the most serious incident occurring at Seletar in Singapore on 26 January 1946, followed by a similar incident at Kallang on the very next day. The allied Air commander-in-chief visited Seletar and had detailed discussions with the men, which he reported to the Air Ministry. Realising the seriousness of the matter, the British Prime Minister, Mr. Clement Atlee, made a statement in the House of Commons on 29 January, outlining the measures being taken to expedite repatriation and release, which seemed to be the root cause of the trouble. On the same day the men of 194 (Transport) Squadron in Rangoon

stopped work. However, they returned to work the next day. The unit was scheduled for disbandment in the near future but in view of this incident, it was disbanded on 15 February 1946.

The mutiny by ratings of the Royal Indian Navy in February 1946 added a new dimension to the problem, especially at Bombay, where the RIAF airmen went on a sympathetic strike. To subdue the mutineers who had taken control of ships and were threatening to bombard Bombay, one of the measures being seriously considered was air attacks using rocket projectiles. However, in view of the strike by RIAF personnel, the authorities felt that Indian squadrons could not be used for this purpose. Responding to an appeal from Sir Roderick Carr, Air Officer Commanding British Air Forces in Southeast Asia, the Allied Air Commander-in-Chief, Sir Keith Park agreed to divert some aircraft from his resources. However, in view of the recent experience in Java, he advised Carr to obtain the approval of the C-in-C India before using RAF and RIAF aircraft in an offensive role against the local population⁶

RIAF personnel refused to report for duty at many stations for varying periods. The naval strike came to an end on 23 February 1946, leading to improvement in the situation at Bombay, though the airmen had still not resumed duty. Other than Bombay, the stations that continued to be affected were Cawnpore, Allahabad and Jodhpur, though conditions seemed to be improving and were expected to become normal soon. However a serious incident occurred in Rangoon, where 140 RIAF personnel failed to report for duty on 23 February. When asked for their grievances, the airmen listed the following demands:

- Equal rights with BORs in the unit canteen.
- Equal distribution of unit dues between the RAF and RIAF.
- Separate Mess for RIAF with half BOR and half Indian type rations.
- Weekly show of Indian films.
- Separate recreation room with Indian periodicals.
- Full entitlement of leave for all RIAF personnel.
- Better living conditions.

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- Higher scale of pay and allowances.
- Second class railways warrants
- Speed up demobilisation.

On the night of 24 February, the commanding officer interviewed two of the of the men's representatives and informed them that their grievances had been forwarded to the Air Marshal Commanding Air Headquarters Burma. Grievances that could be resolved locally would be dealt by the air marshal personally while the remaining questions concerning pay, allowances and demobilisation would be forwarded to higher authorities. The commanding officer emphasised that the men must return to duty before their demands could be considered. The representatives agreed and gave an assurance that they would do so, but the men did not join duty until 28 February 1946.

In February, there was strike at Kohat, the only Air Force station in India manned by the RIAF, where the Station Commander was Group Captain (later Air Chief Marshal) A.M 'Aspy' Engineer. An account of the strike and how it was handled has been described by Squadron Leader (later Air Vice Marshal) Harjinder Singh, who was then posted at Air Force Station Peshawar. On 26 February, Harjinder received a telephone call from Flight Lieutenant Shahzada, adjutant of the Air Force Station Kohat informing him that the airmen had gone on strike that morning. The men had collected at the aerodrome from where they intended to take out a protest march through the city. Group Captain Engineer had asked the adjutant to inform Harjinder that he had already requisitioned some Gurkha troops from the Army to erect a road block at the aerodrome gate, and if necessary, open fire on the strikers if they tried to force their way out. Harjinder asked his Station Commander, Group Captain Vallaine, to permit him to fly to Kohat, without giving him any reason. Fortunately, Vallaine agreed, and detailed Flying Officer Glandstein to take Harjinder to Kohat in a Harvard aircraft.

After reaching Kohat, Harjinder reported to the station commander who gave him some more details of the strike. Apparently the men were in

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no mood to listen to any officer and he advised Harjinder not to go near them. Harjinder felt that unless the situation was brought under control immediately, it would be the end of the only Indian Air Force station in the country. He asked for permission to approach the strikers and talk to them. Engineer refused, but when Harjinder insisted, he relented, telling the latter that that he would not be responsible for his life. When Harjinder approached the strikers, who had collected on the airstrip, one of them shouted: "Don't let this officer come near, because he will call off the strike." But there were others who differed, and wanted him to come. Harjinder proposed that they take a vote by show of hands, and was pleasantly surprised when the majority elected to hear him. After talking to the men, Harjinder found that they had heard that it was planned to bomb and machine gun the naval ratings that had gone on strike in Bombay. When asked for their demands, they said that the station commander should send a message to the commander-in-chief in Delhi telling him that the Indian Air Force Station Kohat refuses to cooperate in bombing their colleagues in the navy. Also, in the signal it should be clearly mentioned that the Air Force station Kohat sympathises with the relatives of the people who have been killed in the firing at Bombay. The rest of the story is best described by Harjinder in his own words:

To my mind, it was a reasonable demand and I asked them: "Is that all?" and they all said "Yes". So I told them: "I will guarantee that the Station Commander will do what you have asked, and what is more, there was never an intention of sending Indian Air Force Squadrons to bomb and machine-gun our naval colleagues and there must have been some misunderstanding. After addressing the men further and quietening them down I told them that they had disgraced themselves by striking, and before it was too late they should report back to work; and as a first consequence, they should immediately fall in. The men readily agreed. I got them fallen-in in three ranks and marched them to the Cinema hall. I told them to accept any punishment that the Station Commander gave without hesitation and if the

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station Commander asked them: "Did you go on strike?" they should say "No, we never had any such intention." It took me exactly ten minutes to settle the issue in this way.

After marching the airmen into the Cinema hall, I reported to the Station Commander and briefed him on what to say. In fairness to Aspy I must say he sent the signal to General Auchinleck on the lines that I had promised the airmen. When he went into the cinema hall and asked the men whether they had intended to go on strike, the men with one voice shouted: "No." As preplanned, he said: "All right, but as a punishment for your indiscipline this morning, I am ordering extra parades in the afternoon for the whole station for one month." They filed out of the hall quietly enough.

After the 'strike' was over, I took off for Peshawar. Some days later I heard that the Station Commander had been called up by Delhi and given a sound dressing down because of the signal which he had sent concerning the Indian Naval mutiny at Bombay.⁷

Another strike that was defused by an Indian officer was the one at the Factory Road Camp in Delhi. The strike lasted four days and was eventually broken by sympathetic handling by Group Captain (later Air Chief Marshal) Subroto Mukerjee, who was ably assisted by Warrant Officer Verghese. After the strike ended, RAF Intelligence was asked to identify the ring leaders. Based on their report, Air Headquarters decided to discharge the personnel involved in the strike. Surprisingly, the first name on the list was that of Warrant Officer Verghese, who had been instrumental in subduing the strike. It was only after Subroto Mukerjee intervened with Air Marshal Sir Rodrick Carr that the orders for Verghese's discharge were withdrawn.

Though officially classified as a mutiny, the incidents in the RIAF were nothing more than 'strikes'. In almost all cases, the airmen resorted to stoppage of work or a sit down strike. They were no slogan shouting, waving of flags or processions, as happened in the mutinies in the other two services that occurred at almost the same time. No violence was used by the strikers

or the authorities, and in most cases, the strikes ended after the intervention of officers who assured the men that their grievances would be looked into sympathetically. None of the participants were punished, though a few of the ring leaders were discharged from service. Though the strikes were not serious, they brought to light the feeling of discontent among the Indian personnel serving in the air force, forcing the British authorities to review the dependability of the armed forces in India. This played a part in the decision of the British to quit India in 1947.

Notes

This chapter is largely based on Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon's *The Transfer of Power* (London, 1982); Lt. Gen S.L. Menezes' *Fidelity and Honour* (New Delhi, 1993); Air Commodore A.L. Saigal's *Birth of An Air Force – The Memoirs of Air Vice Marshal Harjinder Singh* (New Delhi, 1977); and documents in the Ministry of Defence, History Division, New Delhi. Specific references are given below:

1. Air Commodore A.L. Saigal (ed.), *Birth of An Air Force – The Memoirs of Air Vice Marshal Harjinder Singh* (New Delhi, 1977), p. 34.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
3. Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon, (ed.), *The Transfer of Power 1942-47* (12 vols, London, 1982), vol. vii, pp. 894-895.
4. *A Brief History of Events Associated with The Disaffection and 'Strikes' Among Personnel in the RAF units of Air Command, South East Asia, Ministry of Defence, History Division, (MODHD), New Delh, 601/9768/H, pp. 1-2*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
7. Saigal, note 2, pp. 218-221.

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The Naval Mutiny – 1946

The mutiny in the RIN (Royal Indian Navy) in February 1946 was unique in many ways. Mutinies are usually confined to a particular station, establishment or ship. However, this was the first instance when the entire service joined the revolt. The closest parallel was the Great Mutiny of 1857, when almost the whole of the Bengal Army was involved; the Madras and Bombay Armies remained virtually unaffected. This was also probably the first time after 1857 when the general public was caught up in a mutiny in an armed service, leading to mass protests and *hartals*, especially in Bombay. This was in spite of the fact that few Indians were aware of the existence of the Indian Navy, whose role during World War was relatively insignificant and therefore unpublicized. Another feature of the mutiny was that it was directed against the British government and not against superior officers – not a single officer, British or Indian, was harmed.

The naval mutiny was easily suppressed by the use of force and there were some casualties. Though almost all ships and shore establishments were drawn in, the most important events took place in Bombay and Karachi, two of the largest and most populated cities in the subcontinent. The involvement of the political parties, especially the National Congress, and its leaders – Gandhi, Nehru, Patel and Aruna Asaf Ali – ensured that the mutiny received wide publicity. Though the naval mutiny failed to achieve its immediate objectives, its fall-outs were considerable. Along with the mutinies in the air force and the army that occurred almost simultaneously, it led to the realisation that Britain could no longer depend on Indian soldiers,

sailors and airmen to uphold her authority over her colonies in the East. This contributed not only to the British decision to grant independence to India but to advance the date from June 1948 to August 1947.

The mutiny of 1946 was by no means the first that occurred in the Royal Indian Navy. Sailors in merchant vessels as well as men of war have mutinied since the time humans began to cross the seas, and their stories are an important part of the history and folklore of seafaring nations. Mutinies on ships have had a tremendous impact on several issues, some totally unrelated with sailing. It has spawned its own genre in literature, and forms the central theme of some of the most well known writing in all languages, the most famous being *Mutiny on the Bounty*. Mutinies have also caused demographic and social changes, and the creation of new civilisations. To escape the gallows, mutineers often took refuge on remote islands, including some that were at one time bereft of human habitation. Many others escaped and settled down in then virtually unexplored regions, assimilating with the local population. Not surprisingly, residents of some islands in the Pacific claim their ancestry in countries half way round the globe.

When World War II started in September 1939 the Royal Indian Navy was a miniscule force, consisting of about 1,500 sailors and 150 officers. By the time the war ended, its strength had multiplied almost fifteen times. In December 1945, it had 2,438 officers, 214 warrant officers and 21,193 ratings. During this period, there were several mutinies in the service. In March 1942, ratings at the Mechanics Training Establishment at Bombay mutinied demanding higher pay, resulting in seven being sentenced to three months imprisonment. In June 1942 the ratings of HMIS *Konkan*, which was then in the UK, went on hunger strike, due to problems connected with food, accommodation and the scale of rations. Seventeen sailors were awarded three months rigorous imprisonment. Three months later, there was a major case of indiscipline on board the HMIS *Orissa*, again in the UK. This time, not only the men but also the officers were punished. The commanding officer was tried by a general court martial and sentenced to lose a year's

seniority. The 2nd officer and the gunnery officer also lost three months seniority. Thirteen ratings were disgraced, and awarded imprisonment terms ranging from three to seven years. Almost at the same time, there was a less serious case of indiscipline on the HMIS *Khyber* in the UK, after which three men were discharged.

After the four cases in 1942, there were no revolts for almost two years, when there were several incidents with religious overtones. In June 1944, Muslim sailors of the HMIS *Akbar* in Bombay revolted, demanding a mosque, resulting in the discharge of 100 Pathans. A month later, Muslim sailors on board the HMIS *Hamlawar* at Bombay assaulted a sub-lieutenant, alleging that he had insulted the Koran. The officer was found guilty and lost three months seniority. Thirteen men were discharged and ten sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. In July 1944, the men on board HMIS *Shivaji* at Lonavla refused to eat meat that they suspected was contaminated with pork and four had to be discharged. In March 1945, three men on board HMIS *Himalaya* in Karachi went to a mosque after being refused permission. They were declared absent without leave and sentenced to a year's rigorous imprisonment. A month later, there was another revolt on the HMIS *Shivaji* when 51 ratings refused to clean the ship. Thirty-eight were awarded three months rigorous imprisonment.¹

After the end of World War II, the bulk of the Royal Indian Navy was located at Bombay, with smaller complements at Karachi, Madras, Calcutta, Vizagapatnam, Cochin and several other stations. The establishment at Bombay comprised the Royal Indian Navy Depot, which included the Castle Barracks that housed about 900 ratings awaiting appointment to ships or shore establishments; the Fort Barracks that housed the HO (Hostilities Only) ratings; the CCO (Central Communications Office) that handled all signal traffic at Bombay; the Colaba Receiving Station; the Mahul Wireless Station in Trombay Island and the RIN Hospital at Sewri. The other shore establishments at Bombay were HMIS *Talwar*, the training school for communication ratings; HMIS *Machlimar* at Versova, the anti-submarine

training school; HMIS *Hamla* at Marve that held the landing craft; HMIS *Kakauri*, the demobilisation centre that held about 1400 ratings; HMIS *Cheetah*, the second demobilisation centre and training school for Special Service ratings; and HMIS *Feroze* on Malabar Hill that functioned as a training school and demobilisation centre for officers. There was a large number of ships: HMIS *Narbada* and *Jumna* (sloops); *Dhanush* and *Shamsher* (frigates); *Gondwana*, *Assam*, *Mahratta* and *Sind* (corvettes); *Kumaon*, *Kathiawar*, *Khyber*, *Punjab*, *Bombay*, *Madrass*, *Orissa* and *Oudh* (minesweepers); *Clive* and *Lawrence* (old sloops); *Agra*, *Cuttack*, *Karachi*, *Lahore*, *Madura*, *Nautilus*, *Nasik*, *Patna*, *Poona*, *Rampur*, *Berar*, *Amritsar*, and *Cochin* (trawlers); *Nilam*, *Moti*, *Lal* and *Heera* (Persian gun boats); *Kalawati*, *Ramdas*, *Dipawati* and *Bhadrawati* (auxiliary vessels) and a few motor minesweepers. All the ships and establishments were involved in the mutiny, the lone exception being the Frigate HMIS *Shamsher*.²

One of the important establishments at Bombay was the HMIS *Talwar*, the Communication Ratings Training School. When World War II ended, the *Talwar* was under the command of Lieutenant Commander E.M. Shaw. In September 1945, Shaw was transferred as staff communication officer, being relieved by Lieutenant Commander A.T.J. Cole. Both Shaw and Cole were experienced officers and popular with the men. At that time, apart from the 200 communication ratings there were about 700 men under training and about 300 ratings of the draft reserve awaiting demobilization, housed in the *Talwar*. As a result, there was an accommodation crunch. Though the number of ratings was fairly large, there were very few officers. The overcrowding in the barracks, with a large number of men having nothing to do, and an almost complete lack of supervision, all contributed to the dissatisfaction and unrest. On 30 November 1945, on the eve of Navy Day, slogans such as “Quit India”, “Revolt Now”, “Kill the White Dogs” and “Down with the Imperialists” were found written on walls. An inquiry was held but the perpetrators could not be traced. However, a rating named Deb was suspected and discharged on grounds of ‘services no longer required’.³

On 21 January 1946, HMIS *Talwar* got a new commanding officer, Commander F.W. King. Like many British officers in the Royal Indian Navy at that time, King had never served in India earlier and was unfamiliar with the customs, castes and religious prejudices that are so important in this country. The appointment of King was resented by the ship's company, especially since he was not a communication officer, and known for his rough treatment of ratings. It was generally believed that King was sent to the *Talwar* to set things in order since his predecessor, Cole, was lenient and regarded as pro-Indian. On 1 February 1946, slogans similar to those that had been seen two months earlier reappeared on a platform on the *Talwar* from which the commander-in-chief was to take the salute on the next day. The originator, Leading Telegraphist B.C. Dutt was caught and placed under close arrest. However, the slogans continued and one day the tyres of the commanding officer's car were deflated. A few anonymous letters addressed to Commander King also reached his office.

The incident that triggered the mutiny occurred on 8 Feb 1946 when King entered the barrack where several off-duty ratings from the Central Communications Office were resting after having finished their breakfast. Reportedly, King heard some catcalls from the barrack at some WRINs (Women's Royal Indian Navy) who were passing by and was annoyed by the uncivilised behaviour of the ratings, who he thought were abstaining from duty. The men did not notice his presence and continued talking, instead of coming to their feet and paying compliments to the commanding officer. King lost his temper and lashed out at the men, using abusive terms such as "sons of bitches", "jungles" and "coolies", before stomping out of the barrack. The men were agitated, and the next day, fourteen ratings put in a complaint against commander King for using foul language. On 9 February 1946, a Saturday, they were seen by Lieutenant Commander Shaw, who told them that he would forward their complaint to the commanding officer. On Monday, Shaw informed King, who agreed to see the men next Saturday, the day on which personal interviews were granted by the commanding

officer. Shaw tried to impress upon King that in view of the seriousness and urgency of the matter, it would be better to see them earlier and not wait until Saturday, but the latter did not agree. When King saw the men, he warned them that it was a serious offence to make a false complaint against a senior officer. In accordance with regulations, he would give them 24 hours to think over the matter, after which they could, if they wished, put their request in writing. On the same day, Dutt was summarily tried, and a report sent to Naval Headquarters. The ratings did exactly what they were told to do, presenting their written complaints on the morning of 18 February. By this time, the mutiny had already broken out.

The situation on HMIS *Talwar* had deteriorated considerably during the week, and all that was needed was a spark to ignite the mutiny. As on several earlier occasions, it was provided by the galley. On 17 February 1946, a Sunday, cooks in two vegetarian messes mixed *dal* (lentils) and vegetables for the evening meal, which the men refused to eat, complaining that it was inedible. The duty officer came to know of the incident, but did not report it. The ratings went to bed hungry, but did not create any trouble. Next morning, a large number of men refused to eat breakfast and shouted slogans. King was informed when he reached his office at about 9 a.m., but he left soon afterwards to have his breakfast, without leaving any instructions. He returned to his office after about half an hour. When divisions were piped, Indian ratings did not come to the parade ground and began shouting and jeering. The flag officer Bombay was informed on telephone that the men were not listening to the officers and were completely out of control. King held a conference that was attended by all officers and warrant officers. However, no plans were made or instructions given for dealing with the situation. Lieutenants SN Kohli and SM Nanda - both were destined to become chiefs of Naval Staff - volunteered to act as trouble shooters and made another attempt to speak to the men. However, they were hooted down⁴

At midday, the Flag Officer Bombay, Rear Admiral A.R. Rattray arrived and spoke to the men, asking them to return to duty and then left. However,

the men did not obey his orders, and the situation worsened. By this time all other establishments that were manned by communication ratings had been affected. This included the Central Communication Office that was manned by ratings from the *Talwar*, as well as the Receiving Station at Colaba and the Dockyard Signal Station. B.C. Dutt, who was under detention, was sent by King to try and pacify the deserters, but they were in no mood to listen. In the evening at about 5 pm Admiral Rattray again visited HMIS *Talwar* and spoke to the men. He asked them to appoint representatives who should meet him next morning with the list of grievances. He also informed them that Commander King was being replaced by Captain Inigo-Jones. This only added fuel to the fire, since Inigo-Jones was known for his anti-Indian bias and repressive measures, an example of which he had exhibited when dealing with a similar outbreak at the Mechanical Training Establishment, resulting in him being given the pseudonym “butcher of the RIN”.⁵

On 19 February, Rear Admiral Rattray arrived at about 0930 a.m. and met the representatives of the ratings. However, by this time some ratings from other establishments had also arrived and a few of them tried to disrupt the meeting. The ratings handed over to Rattray a list of 14 demands, as given below:

1. No victimisation.
2. Release of RK Singh, who had been detained earlier.
3. Speeding up demobilisation.
4. Action against Commander King.
5. Improvement in the standard of food.
6. Indian ratings to be given the same scale of pay and allowances as personnel of the Royal Navy, along with access to NAAFI canteens.
7. Kit not to be taken back at the time of release.
8. Grant of higher terminal benefits on release.
9. Good behaviour by officers towards ratings.
10. Regular promotion of lower deck personnel as officers.
11. Appointment of a new commanding officer.

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12. Immediate release of INA prisoners and Captain Rashid, who had been sentenced to rigorous imprisonment.
13. Enquiry into incidents of firing on public all over India.
14. Withdrawal of Indian troops from Indonesia and Middle East. ⁶

While the first eleven demands pertained to the navy, the last three were of a political nature, which were probably added as an afterthought. All that Admiral Rattray could do was to assure the men that he would forward their request to the FOCRIN (Flag Officer Commanding Royal Indian Navy) at Delhi. Some ratings had hauled down the Naval Ensign while the meeting was going on, but it was quickly hoisted again. Admiral Rattray left the *Talwar* at about 11.40 am, returning at 3.45 pm for a second brief visit. By this time the unrest had spread to other establishments in Bombay. About 2000 ratings came to the breakwater and asked the sailors manning the ships to join a 'sit down' strike. Some ratings joined a procession in the streets, taken out by ratings from other establishments. This did not go unnoticed and soon everyone in the city came to know of the strike. The news was also broadcast by All India Radio and reached other stations around the country. Accompanied by the area commander and the commissioner, Admiral Rattray visited the *Talwar* again at 10.20 p.m.. After spending a few minutes they left for the Castle Barracks, where the situation appeared to be more serious.

Captain Inigo-Jones was in command of the Castle Barracks up to 19 February 1946 when he was transferred to HMIS *Talwar*, handing over to Commander EC Streatfield-James. When the latter arrived at Castle Barracks in the morning at about 8.30 am, he found his way barred by several jostling ratings. He forced his way in and held a conference with the men. He had almost succeeded in convincing them to give up the strike when a rating from another establishment arrived and asked the men to follow him. More than 200 ratings agreed to go with him and left in a procession to the *Talwar*. This was immediately conveyed

to the flag officer Bombay. Soon after this when some officers arrived and were entering the gates the ratings crowded round them and made them remove their caps, shouting “*topi utaro*”. Most of them complied, but Lieutenant Commander BS Soman, who was later to head the Indian Navy, apparently refused, telling them that since he had not put on his cap with the permission of the ratings he saw no reason to take it off on their orders.⁷

Around midday, a rating hauled down the ensign, but it was rehoisted by Lieutenant Sassoon. Commander Streatfield-James tried to open a dialogue with the men but they were in no mood to listen to the Indian officers, including Soman, who were sent to talk to them. Nothing noteworthy happened after this and the men had their lunch as usual. In the evening Streatfield-James went to Vithal House and pleaded with the flag officer Bombay for military aid. Later that night, two chief petty officers from Fort Barracks entered Castle Barracks and demanded the release of about 150 ratings who had been arrested in the *bazaar* by the military and police during the day. When this was refused, they left, threatening that they would secure the release of the prisoners by force. At 11 pm, the flag officer Bombay arrived, accompanied by the Area Commander, Major General Beard and Brigadier Southgate. Commander Streatfield-James asked for the Army to be called in, but the flag officer Bombay did not agree.

Apart from the *Talwar* and Castle Barracks where the major events occurred on 19 February 1946, there were some incidents on other ships and establishments also. About 250 to 300 ratings from HMIS *Kakaur* broke into HMIS *Machlimar* shouting slogans. They asked the ratings of the *Machlimar* to join them. Some agreed while a couple of reluctant ratings were forcibly dragged out. Some ratings of HMIS *Assam* hoisted a Congress flag and refused work in sympathy with the ratings of the *Talwar*. They also took out some weapons and indulged in looting. One such incident has been described by described by Trilochan Singh Trewn, whose ship was alongside the outer breakwater:

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One fine early morning, I noticed about 20 junior ratings surrounding the main duty-free canteen located close to the smithy shop inside the naval dockyard in Mumbai. This large canteen was a part of an international chain of canteens run by the Royal Navy and was well-stocked with choicest brands of foreign liquor, cheeses, caviar, cigarettes etc mostly imported. About four ratings forced themselves into the store and came out with cartons of cigarettes, cameras and electric irons etc. It was followed by another rush of ratings who now were holding boxes of scotch whisky in both hands and sported imported umbrellas slinging (sic) on their shoulders. Soon the canteen staff also arrived but was helpless and terrified as some of the ratings carried arms.⁸

Seeing the Congress flag flying on the *Assam* the ratings of HMIS *Sind* and HMIS *Mahratta* also refused work. On HMIS *Shivaji* flags of both the Congress and the Muslim League were hoisted and the ratings shouted slogans such as 'Quit India' and 'Quit Indonesia'. On HMIS *Clive* the communication branch ratings went on strike, with six leading telegraphists and forty-six ordinary telegraphists refusing to turn out. The HMIS *Punjab* and HMIS *Berar* were in the dockyard. A crowd of about 2,000 ratings appeared on the breakwater and boarded both ships, pulling down the ensigns and the Union Jacks. The ratings of the ships did not join them but refused work.

On 20 February 1946, at about 2 am, a party of 150 ratings from HMIS *Hamla* forced their way into the Castle Barracks, led by Lieutenant Sobhani, who had joined the striking ratings. Sobhani asked the ratings in Castle Barracks to join him and left after twenty minutes. Streatfield-James immediately called for military aid. The area commander, in consultation with the flag officer Bombay, decided to place a platoon each at the Central Communication Office, Colaba Receiving Station and Mahaul Wireless Station. At 6 a.m. a platoon of the Mahratta Light Infantry (MLI) arrived. Two hours later a lorry full of ratings drove inside the Castle Barracks. All hands were called to the quarterdeck where a spokesman addressed them. They were informed that a Central Strike Committee had been formed with

Leading Seaman M.S. Khan as the president and petty officer (Telegraphist) Madan Singh as the vice president. The ratings of Castle Barracks were asked to elect two representatives for the Central Strike Committee, who were later taken to the *Talwar* in the lorry.

The FOCRIN (Flag Officer Commanding Royal Indian Navy), Vice Admiral J.H. Godfrey flew down to Bombay from Delhi in the morning. After consulting the Flag Officer Bombay and General Rob Lockhart, the GOC-in-C Southern Command, he agreed that help from the military was essential to quell the unrest. Before returning to Delhi the FOCRIN met some members of the Strike Committee, led by Leading Seaman Khan. According to BC Dutt, who was then in custody, “...I do not recall if Godfrey wanted to meet the members or whether the Central Committee turned to Godfrey, There was little choice considering that the Committee could not get to first base with the National leadership. In any case, Godfrey made no attempt to come inside the *Talwar* to meet us: our men went to meet him.”⁹

At about 2.30 pm, two additional platoons of the MLI arrived at Castle Barracks, bringing up their strength to a company. Some of the ratings threw stones at the troops, who soon established machine gun posts to cover the entry and exit gates. About 150 ratings were arrested outside Castle Barracks. In the afternoon at 4 pm, M.S. Khan, the president of the Strike Committee arrived and addressed the men. Soon afterwards the men watched a cinema show that had been organised by for the ratings. Things were relatively quiet until 6.30 pm when the ratings who were outside returned and demanded that the troops be withdrawn. The situation appeared to be worsening but the troops maintained their cool and did not fire.

The situation on *Talwar* seemed to be calm until about 2.45 pm when troops from the MLI arrived and were posted at the gates. A sailor who wanted to go out was prevented from doing so, leading to some violence that subsided after the guard fired one shot. A crowd of about 300 ratings broke into the *Machlimar*, hauled down the White Ensign, tore it up and hoisted a “Jai Hind” flag. They damaged vehicles and broke window-panes. When they

left, all ratings joined them. On *Clive*, the seamen and stokers also joined the telegraphists, who had mutinied the previous day. They took over a motor-boat that was used to ferry them ashore.

The mutiny reached its peak on 21 February 1946, a day that was characterised by violence and high drama. In the morning some of the mutineers in Castle Barracks asked for permission to go to the *Talwar*, to contact their leaders and get instructions. They were given transport and left at about 7.30 am. They returned after some time and told the others that it has been decided that the strike will continue. At about 9 am, the ratings tried to force their way out of the main gate. A crowd of civilians and ratings had gathered near the gate. The commander of the guard, a British major, warned them but when this did not have any effect, he ordered the guard to open fire. The MLI troops were reluctant to fire on the ratings and this resulted in some delay before fire was opened. The troops fired one round each, and a total of 18 rounds in all were fired, most of them directed not at the ratings but at the ground in front of them. The ratings immediately closed the gate, placed motor vehicles across it, rushed back towards the barracks, broke open the armory and took out weapons and ammunition. Soon they were firing back at the troops from the ramparts.

The military cordoned off the area around the Castle Barracks and cleared the roads passing along the Mint and Town Hall. All offices and establishment were closed and the workers who arrived for work were turned back. The MLI platoons were replaced by troops of the Leicestershire Regiment. British troops and Royal Marines were deployed to guard all approaches to Castle Barracks and the waterfront at the Gateway of India. The firing from Castle Barracks intensified and one RAF airman in the CCO was injured. In addition to rifles, the ratings began using light machine guns and grenades. The firing continued for almost six hours and ceased only when a 'ceasefire' came into effect later in the day.

The sound of firing was heard by the men aboard the ships, who were all on the decks, looking anxiously towards the Castle Barracks from where

messages were being transmitted informing them of the firing. At about 10.30 am, Khan, the president of the Strike Committee came to the bridge of the *Kumaon* and addressed the men. Speaking in both Urdu and English he exhorted the men to raise steam, load guns and stand by for action. He warned the men that they might have to take up battle positions to defend themselves and the dockyard. He also asked them to order all British officers to leave their ships, asserting that the ratings could do without them. Indian officers could also leave, in case they wished to. His inflammatory speech had the desired effect, and the men promptly armed themselves with whatever weapons they could lay their hands on. The officers were ordered to hand over the keys to magazines and leave the ships. In the flagship of the RIN, the *Narbada*, the ratings did not bother to ask for the keys – they simply broke open the magazine and loaded the guns.

Around midday, the CCO was evacuated and control of Castle Barracks was handed over to the army. However, five naval officers, including two medical officers in the Depot Sick Quarters, were trapped inside. After some rough treatment at the hands of the ratings, they were permitted to leave in the evening. Surgeon Lieutenant Commander Martin, the senior medical officer, offered to talk to the flag officer Bombay and arrange for a truce. The ratings were initially suspicious but later agreed. Martin spoke to Commander Payne at Vithal House, who informed him that they had already contacted the Central Strike Committee, which was planning to send a truce party to Castle Barracks.

The situation in *Talwar* became tense after the firing in Castle Barracks. At about 10 am, Captain Inigo-Jones, accompanied by Leading Seaman Khan and two other members of the Strike committee, left for Castle Barracks to persuade the ratings to stop firing. Jones returned alone after an hour, leading to excitement and rumours that persisted until Khan came back in the evening. At 2.20 pm, the FOCRIN broadcast a message on All India Radio, which was relayed to all ships at 5.45 pm. He ended his broadcast with the chilling message: “...I want again to make it quite plain that the Government of India will never give in to violence. To continue the struggle is the height

of folly when you take into account the overwhelming forces at the disposal of the Government at this time and which will be used to their utmost even if it means the destruction of the Navy of which we have been so proud.”¹⁰

After the firing at Castle Barracks, the situation was critical because there was a grave danger of the ships under the control of the mutineers opening fire on the city and causing casualties to civilians. Some ships did open fire with machine guns and Oerlikons in the direction of Castle Barracks but fortunately there was little effect. In some cases the weapons were being manned by untrained personnel such as ships clerks, cooks and wireless operators who had never handled them before. Due to lack of coordination and communication there was considerable confusion and a spate of rumours. This sometimes resulted in comic situations, such as the one concerning HMIS *Kumaon*, which was moored adjacent to the breakwater and being used by the Central Strike Committee for its deliberations. After Khan came on board and addressed the men, the officers left the ship. The Oerlikon was loaded and the ship put out to sea. However, after sailing about 100 feet it returned and was secured. Trewn describes the incident thus:

The morning news on the radio indicated that fully-armed destroyers of British Navy had already steamed out of Trincomalee harbour and were heading towards Mumbai to quell the Mutiny. The naval ratings' strike committee decided, in a confused manner, the HMIS *Kumaon* had to leave Mumbai harbour while HMIS *Kathiawar* was already in the Arabian Sea under the command of a striking rating. At about 10.30 HMIS *Kumaon* suddenly let go the shore ropes, without even removing the ships' gangway while officers were discussing the law and order situation on the outer breakwater jetty. So the wooden gangway, six-metre-long was protruding out of the ship's starboard waist when the ship moved away from the jetty under command of a revolver bearing senior rating. However, within two hours fresh instructions were received from the strikers' control room and the ship returned to the same berth.¹¹

After the call for the officers to leave their ships most of them were allowed to go after handing over their weapons. Some of the Indian officers remained on board, but stayed below decks. In most cases, the officers left without any difficulty, the ratings themselves assisting them. Meanwhile, the FOCRIN asked the commander-in-chief East Indies to send a naval force to assist in putting down the mutiny. In London, Prime Minister Atlee informed the House of Commons that several warships including a cruiser of the Royal Navy were speeding towards Bombay in response to an urgent request from India. Overall command of the situation was now in the hands of Lieutenant General Rob Lockhart, GOC-in-C Southern Command, who had received instructions from the Commander-in-Chief, General Claude Auchinleck. By the evening a regiment of artillery equipped with 12-pounder guns, two British infantry battalions and several armoured cars had reached the city. RAF bombers had already arrived at Santa Cruz and the cruiser *Glasgow* was expected soon from Trincomalee.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, a member of the Congress Working Committee was in Bombay at that time. The mutineers contacted him and requested his help. But Sardar Patel refused to interfere, making it clear that it was wrong on their part to take up arms against their superiors. He termed it as an act of indiscipline, which could not be condoned in an armed service like the navy. This was a setback to the mutineers, who had been counting on support of the political leaders. The ultimatum in the FOCRIN's broadcast also dampened their spirits, and many started having second thoughts about the strike. At 4.30 pm, Khan sent a message to all ships to cease fire and await further instructions, which would be communicated after his meeting with the FOCRIN and flag officer Bombay. In the evening a truce party of officers visited the Castle Barracks and told them to give up their arms since talks were now going on between the government and the national leaders, and the matter would be resolved soon. The ratings were reluctant to surrender their arms but agreed when they were informed that this would result in loss of support from the political parties. Eventually they decided to hand over the weapons and ammunition and release the detained officers.

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By dusk the firing had stopped but the troops were not withdrawn. The supply of food and water had also not been restored. It was made clear to the mutineers that troops would be withdrawn only after they surrendered unconditionally. The Strike Committee met in the *Talwar* to review the situation and decide its next move. It drew up an appeal to the people and all political parties to come to their aid. Drawing attention to their demands and the brutal methods being adopted by the authorities to crush their “peaceful strike”, they called for a *hartal* (general strike). Pointing to the threat of the FOCRIN to destroy the Indian Navy, the committee said:

You do not want your Indian brothers to be destroyed by British bullets. You know our demands are just, you must support us. We appeal to you all, particularly to the leaders of the Congress, League and Communist parties: Use all you might to prevent a blood bath in Bombay! Force the naval authorities to stop shooting and threats and to negotiate with us! Rally our people to support us, through a peaceful *hartal* and peaceful strikes! We appeal to you, brothers and sisters, to respond.¹²

On 22 February 1946, the situation remained critical, and incidents of looting and hooliganism continued. At about 10 am, the FOCRIN arrived at HMIS *Talwar* and was received outside the gate by Captain Inigo-Jones. Shortly afterwards command of *Talwar* was handed over to Commander S.G. Karmakar. The wireless telegraphy station at Mahul was handed over to the army. At about 11 am, a message from the FOCRIN was delivered to the mutineers over a loud hailer, informing them that the C-in-C Southern Command has assumed control in Bombay. To show them that ample forces were available in Bombay, the C-in-C had ordered a formation of RAF aircraft to fly over the harbour in the afternoon. The aircraft would not take any offensive action, provided no action was taken against them. If the mutineers decided to surrender, they were to hoist a black or blue flag and muster all hands on deck on the side facing Bombay and await further orders. At about

2.30 pm, a formation of bombers flew over the harbour.

The citizens of Bombay had shown their sympathy with the ratings from the day the strike began. On 19 February, the people were amazed to see the ratings parading through the streets, shouting slogans. Many of them cheered the ratings and some even joined the processions. The spectacle was repeated next morning, with larger crowds watching and cheering the ratings. The same afternoon troops were positioned at the gates of the naval barracks. A large crowd collected outside and many of them passed on food packets to the ratings confined inside. On 21 February, when the situation escalated and the ratings attacked the guards, the civilian crowd joined them. The firing by the guards caused considerable excitement in the city and a large crowd collected around the Gateway of India and several other places. In many places there were scenes of hooliganism and looting, and the police had to open fire to control the mobs. By the evening, the people came to know of the Strike Committee's call for a *hartal* next day. In spite of Sardar Patel's appeal not to observe the *hartal*, many people responded. Among them were 30,000 mill hands who downed tools, as well as workers in other establishments such as offices, workshops and tramway depots. The city transport system collapsed and unruly crowds attacked Europeans at several places, setting fire to their shops, offices and cars. The situation was beyond the control of the Police and British troops were brought in to restore order. The crowds paced barricades on roads to impede the movement of military vehicles and resorted to violence, leading to fire being opened at several places. Finally, curfew had to be imposed in the dockyard and the adjoining areas

Sardar Patel, who the mutineers had met a day earlier, sent the following message to the mutineers: "The strikers should lay down all arms and should go through the formality of a surrender and the Congress would do its level best to see that there is no victimization and the legitimate demands of naval ratings are met as soon as possible".¹³

Because of the curfew imposed during the previous night, the city appeared calm in the morning on 23 February 1946. But as the day advanced, crowds

began to collect on the streets. The newspapers carried the news that the strike had been called off at the instance of Sardar Patel and Jinnah, but most people refused to believe this and took to the streets. During the day, violence occurred at several places in the heavily populated working class areas. Rioters looted shops selling foodgrains and textiles, and set fire to factories, including the Kohinoor and Usha Woollen Mills. The entire city seemed to be in flames, with hundreds of motor-cars, buses, trams and train coaches being set on fire. A 3,000 strong crowd attacked the police station at Mahim, and almost lynched the Inspector in charge. The living quarters of policemen were ransacked at Two Tanks and Null Bazaar and their belongings thrown on the streets. Clashes between the rioters and the Police and Military left about 150 people dead and over 1,500 injured. Citizens recalled that this was the worst rioting that the city had witnessed in living memory.

As the day wore on the pressure on the leaders of the mutiny increased to resolve the impasse. The shortage of food and water had begun to tell on their endurance. The stern warning from the authorities, the military presence and the snub from the political leaders left them with little choice. The Central Strike Committee met on *Talwar* and deliberated on the message received from Sardar Patel. Without the support of the Congress, they realised that they could not achieve anything and it was decided to call off the strike. There were many who did not agree, and wanted to carry on the struggle. Shortly afterwards, a message arrived from Jinnah that echoed the advice given by Patel, asking them to surrender, and promising to see that justice was done. At 4.30 pm representatives of all ships were brought to the *Talwar* and met the Strike Committee, which apprised them of this decision. At 6.15 pm, the representatives informed Commodore Karmakar that they were ready to surrender unconditionally. The information was conveyed to all other stations and ships outside Bombay. The mutiny was over.

Other than Bombay, the station most affected by the mutiny was Karachi. Though the number of ships and establishments was smaller, in terms of violence and casualties Karachi surpassed Bombay. The mutiny affected the

two ships that were anchored in the harbour at Keamari - HMIS *Hindustan* and HMIS *Travancore* - and the three shore establishments at Manora - HMIS *Bahadur*, the Boys' Training Establishment; HMIS *Chamak*, the Radar School and HMIS *Himalaya*, the Gunnery School. All the ships and establishments were affected with the *Hindustan* witnessing the heaviest exchange of fire between the mutineers and troops of the Indian Army. When the mutiny ended at Karachi on 23 February 1946, eight lives had been lost and 33 persons lay wounded, including some British soldiers.

The mutiny in Bombay started on 19 February but it was only on the next day that the effect was felt in Karachi. Since the mutiny had been initiated by ratings from the communication branch in Bombay, it was easy for them to convey the information to their colleagues manning communications in other ships and establishments. However, the signal that triggered the mutiny at Karachi came not from Bombay but from Delhi. At about 10 am a message was received from Naval Headquarters ordering HMIS *Travancore* and HMIS *Hindustan* to proceed to sea at 5 pm. The former proceeded to the buoy, and waited for the latter to sail, as ordered. However, the ratings manning the *Hindustan* had other ideas. At 2.15 pm, 11 ratings walked ashore without permission, shouting and gesticulating, followed by another five about two hours later. They were joined by 28 ratings from the *Travancore* and several others from the *Himalaya*, the Gunnery School. The ratings proceeded to the market at Keamari and urged the shop owners to down shutters. Shouting slogans such as "Jai Hind" and "Inquilab Zindabad" they marched in a procession to the Jackson Bazaar and the railway station, declaring that they were proceeding to Delhi. By 6 pm, most of them returned to their ships but refused to go on board. Shortly afterwards, when the captain of the *Hindustan* returned after meeting the naval officer-in-charge, the ratings demanded the removal of the first lieutenant for his insulting behaviour.

At about 7 am on 21 February 1946, the ratings of the *Hindustan* were mustered. Four of them gave their complaints to the captain. At about 9 am, two of the men who had complaints accompanied the captain to meet the

naval officer-in-charge, returning to the ship shortly afterwards. Meanwhile, about forty ratings of HMIS *Bahadur* proceeded to the quarter deck, pulled down and tore the Ensign, hoisting in its place a 'Jai Hind' flag. They made their way to HMIS *Chamak*, the Radar Training School. However, when they tried to enter, the boys from *Chamak* resisted, but gave in after a while. The crowd then proceeded to HMIS *Himalaya*, which was similarly invaded. The ensign was hauled down, window-panes broken, vehicles damaged and cells opened. The mob, which now had men from three ships – *Bahadur*, *Chamak* and *Himalaya* – then seized two landing craft and started moving towards Keamari from where they intended to go to Karachi.

When the two landing craft packed with ratings from Manora were about two hundred yards from the shore they were intercepted by two motor-boats carrying British parachutists. The army captain in command ordered the landing craft to proceed towards China Creek but the ratings continued moving towards Keamari. At about 10 am, the landing craft with about 50 ratings, armed with hockey sticks and canes, came alongside the *Hindustan*. As the ratings were trying to board the *Hindustan*, the parachutists from one of the boats opened fire. This was followed by firing from the quayside, which had been occupied by the military. The ratings of *Hindustan* loaded the Oerlikons and fired at the motor-boats, which moved towards China Creek. Some shots were also directed at a BOAC aircraft that was parked nearby. Two British soldiers were wounded, while two ratings from the *Bahadur* and three ratings from the *Himalaya* who were in the crowd on board the *Hindustan* died in the firing.

To prevent the ratings from marching into the city as they had done on the previous day, the army and police had cordoned off the bridge connecting Keamari with Karachi. The ratings on board the *Hindustan* tried to break the cordon and enter the city but did not succeed. The enraged ratings gave an ultimatum that if the British troops were not withdrawn from the harbour they would be open fire with the Oerlikons and other armament on board the ships. However, this did not have any effect and the army pickets remained.

During the night additional troops were moved in to the harbour. Troops were deployed on the terrace of the buildings near the wharf and mounted artillery was positioned nearby.

At about 9 am, on 22 February 1946, Commodore Curtis went on board the *Hindustan* and asked the men to surrender, warning them that the army action would begin at 9.30 if they did not surrender. At 10 am, another warning was issued giving a deadline of 10.30 am for surrender. The ratings the *Hindustan* responded by manning the ship's guns. They had decided not to give up without a fight. At 10.30 am, the British troops opened fire with 75 mm howitzers and mortars. The ratings retaliated with all armaments on board the ship, including the 4-inch guns. It was an unequal battle but the firing continued for about twenty minutes before the ratings gave up. At 1050 a white flag was hoisted on the *Hindustan*, whose upper deck was on fire. Firing was stopped and the ratings surrendered to the army. One rating each of *Hindustan*, *Travancore*, and *Chamak*, two of *Bahadur* and three of *Himalaya* were killed and several others wounded.¹⁴

Though the major events concerning the mutiny occurred at Bombay and Karachi, ships and establishments at other locations were also affected. HMIS *Kathiawar*, a minesweeper, was on a good will cruise along the Western Coast when the mutiny broke out at Bombay. The ship was at Porbander on 20 and 21 February, when the ratings learned of the incidents at Bombay and Karachi on the wireless, with the officers remaining unaware of the mutiny. On 22 February, the ship sailed for Veraval, its next port of call. However, without warning, the ratings seized control of the ship, confining all officers to the wardroom. The ship was turned around and set course for Karachi when information was received that the *Hindustan* had surrendered. The commanding officer resumed command but the ratings insisted that the goodwill cruise be called off and the ship should sail to Bombay, so that they could learn for themselves the true state of affairs. By the time the ship reached Bombay on 23 February the strike had been called off.¹⁵

The 37th Minesweeping Flotilla comprising the *Rohilkhnad*, *Hongkong*, *Deccan*, *Bengal*, *Bihar*, *Baluchistan* and *Kistna*, was in the Andamans when the mutiny started in Bombay. The ships were anchored in Semaris Bay at Port Blair carrying out 'boiler cleaning', and were to resume minesweeping operations as soon as this was over. The ratings heard the news of the mutiny on BBC and All India Radio. They also received wireless messages asking them to join the strike. After the broadcast of Admiral Godfrey's message on 21 February tempers ran high and there was considerable unrest on all the ships. Next morning, the ratings of the *Kistna* stopped work, and a motor-boat went around the harbour asking others to join the strike. In the evening a concert was arranged on the *Deccan*, which was attended by ratings from other ships also. The performance was interrupted by one of the ratings who announced that it was shameful that they were enjoying themselves while their brothers in Bombay were being killed. The concert was stopped and there was a lot of slogan shouting, which continued when the men returned to their ships. On 23 February, the ratings of all the ships refused to fall in. They refused the orders of their officers and daily routine was not carried out. Though the mutiny was over the same evening, the men refused to resume work and insisted that the flotilla sail for Bombay. Commander Bailey, the senior officer present, visited all the ships and talked to the men but they were adamant. He had no choice and ordered the flotilla to sail for Bombay¹⁶ Commodore RP Khanna, who was then serving on the *Rohilkhand*, recalls that the men did not harm the officers, and when they reached Bombay, the Chief Bosun's mate escorted them to the Taj Mahal Hotel.

HMIS *Valsura*, the Electrical and Torpedo Training School at Jamnagar, had about three hundred ratings. The ratings did not join the mutiny, but held a meeting on 21 February and passed some resolutions, which included a demand for the release of all sailors arrested at Bombay. On 23 February, papers were found containing slogans such as "Join the Talwar Strike", and "Death to White Skins". The same day some ratings from Bombay arrived with copies of the *Free Press Journal*, which had given wide coverage to the

mutiny. After the mutiny ended at Bombay, a news broadcast on 24 February mentioned that the personnel of HMIS *Valsura* had not joined the strike. This agitated the ratings, who felt that it showed that they had no sympathy with their colleagues in Bombay. They decided to make amends and struck work on 25 February, refusing to fall in. They surrendered on 26 February after a platoon of 26th Sikhs arrived to restore order.¹⁷

At Calcutta, the ratings of the HMIS *Hooghly*, a shore establishment, refused duty on 19 February in sympathy with the men of the *Talwar*. The commodore, Bay of Bengal spoke to the men who said that it was a peaceful strike. Next morning, the sentries refused duty. The WRINs were sent away in view of the deteriorating situation. On 21 February the stewards, cooks and topasses at Lord Sinha road went on strike, instigated by the *Hooghly* men. The next two days passed off peacefully, but the strike continued. Finally, a military guard was posted on 24 February, after which the strike ended.¹⁸

In HMIS *India* at Delhi, some ratings in the Naval Barracks refused work on 20 February. The men were assembled but refused commands when called to attention on the arrival of the commanding officer. They were asked to nominate a representative who could put up their grievances. Finally, 56 men agreed to join duty while the rest refused. Next morning a platoon of Gurkhas arrived and placed 38 men under arrest.¹⁹

At Vizakhapatnam, the naval units comprised the HMIS *Circars*, a shore establishment; three ships – HMISs *Sonavati*, *Ahmedabad* and *Shillong* – and certain flotillas. Effects of the mutiny in Bombay were felt only on 21 February. Ratings of the *Circars* hauled down the ensign and shouted slogans in front of the Navy Office. They went to the golf course and shouted at the officers. The harbour signal centre hoisted a “Jai Hind” flag. This was seen by the ratings of the *Sonawati* and *Shillong* who followed suit. Ratings from other ships boarded the *Ahmedabad* and asking the men to join them, pulled down the ensign, which was promptly rehoisted by the quartermaster. Seventeen ratings left the ship to join the others. About half the ratings of the *Sonavati* also left. On 22 February, a conference was held in the Sub-Area Headquarters and the

army took over all naval establishments in Vizakhapatnam. The mutineers were rounded up and taken in military custody. By 25 February, all the ratings who had left their ships returned. The ring-leaders were detained, with the rest being permitted to join their ships.²⁰

Similar incidents occurred at several other stations. At Cochin the ratings of the HMIS *Baroda* struck work for 24 hours, with those of the HMIS *Venduruthy*, a shore establishment, remained unaffected. At Madras the ratings of the shore establishment HMIS *Adyar* decided to show their sympathy to the Bombay mutineers. Donning No. 10 dress they took out a procession and shouted slogans. An officer who asked them to go back was struck with a belt by a rating. However, they went back and joined duty. At the Wireless Telegraphy Station at Aden the ratings went on a hunger strike on 20 February when they heard about the strike at Bombay. Next day the three watches refused to carry out their duties, resulting in disruption in communications.²¹

In accordance with the rules, a Board of Inquiry was held by the naval authorities to enquire into the incidents on board every ship and shore establishment. In addition, the government constituted a Commission of Inquiry, which was chaired by Sir S. Fazl Ali, chief justice of the Patna High Court. The two judicial members were Justice K.S. Krishnaswami Iyengar, chief justice of Cochin State, and Justice Mehr Chand Mahajan, of the Lahore High Court. The two service members were Vice Admiral W.R. Patterson, flag officer commanding the cruiser squadron in East Indies Fleet, and Major General T.W. Rees, general officer commanding 4th Indian Division. The commission began its deliberations in April and submitted its report in July 1946.

In its report, the commission identified four main causes of the mutiny. These were discontent due to long standing grievances; low state of morale, bad management and unsuitability of a large number of ratings; politics and the incidents that occurred on the *Talwar*. In its concluding remarks, the commission commented: "The basic cause of the mutiny in our opinion was widespread discontent among the naval men arising mainly from a number

of service grievances which had remained unredressed for some time and were aggravated by the political situation. Without this discontent, the mutiny would not have taken place.”²²

Though politics was listed as one of the causes of the mutiny, it was not among the major ones. It is true that the mutineers did approach several politicians, but their response was lukewarm. The first person they contacted was Aruna Asaf Ali, who was requested by the ratings of the *Talwar* to be their spokesman and take up their cause with national leaders. Not wishing to get involved in the strike, she advised them to remain calm and contact the “highest Congress authority in Bombay, Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel.” When contacted by Aruna, Patel replied that since the ratings did not take his advice before resorting to the strike, he saw no reason why he or she should interfere. Patel’s views were supported by the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee whose President, S.K. Patil, advised the ratings “to observe perfect discipline in their conduct and maintain an atmosphere of non-violence in all circumstances.”²³

Alarmed by the events that occurred on 21 and 22 February, Aruna Asaf Ali wired Nehru, requesting him to come down to Bombay immediately to ‘control and avoid tragedy.’ Sardar Patel was equally perturbed by the violent turn of events, and wrote to the Governor of Bombay assuring him that the Congress Party would do its bit to control the violence and end the strike. The leaders of the Muslim League, MA Jinnah and Liaqat Ali Khan, also felt it necessary to advise the mutineers to call off the strike. The issue was discussed in the Central Legislative Assembly on 22 and 23 February 1946. On 26 February 1946 Nehru and Patel addressed a gathering at Chowpatty in Bombay, decrying the violence, while commending the ratings for their patriotic spirit. The only leader who came out unequivocally against the mutiny was Mahatma Gandhi. Unlike most other political leaders who preferred to call it a strike, Gandhi was very clear that it was a mutiny. In a scathing comment on the action of the ratings, he said: “If they mutinied for the freedom of India, they were doubly wrong. They could not do so

without a call from a prepared revolutionary party. They were thoughtless and ignorant, if they believed that by their might they would deliver India from foreign domination.”²⁴

However, according to BC Dutt, who was in custody at that time, the aim of the mutiny was to end British rule, and the refusal to eat food was chosen as a convenient excuse. “We decided to incite the ratings on the bad food issue. They must refuse to eat. That would constitute a corporate offence – mutiny”.²⁵ Dutt’s claim is not supported by others, including some of his closest associates. While there is no doubt that Dutt was the first one to raise the banner of revolt by writing slogans before the FOCRIN’s inspection on 2 February 1946, there is no evidence of this act being in any way connected with the mutiny. After his arrest a search of his papers revealed that he was in possession of revolutionary literature. He called himself an ‘Azad Hindi’ and tried to persuade others to join him, but apparently found few supporters. Throughout the mutiny he was in detention and had no contact with leaders of the strike committee. In fact, when Commander King tried to take his help and sent him to talk to the mutineers, they sent him back, making it clear that they had no faith in him. One of his close friends called him a sycophant and a devoted follower of Mir Jafar (i.e. a traitor).²⁶

The reasons for the mutiny have been spelt out by one of the leaders, Petty Officer (Telegraphist) Madan Singh, who was vice president of the Strike Committee. During an interview he said: ²⁷

There had been a current of deep-rooted discontent simmering underneath the surface calm which erupted on February 18, almost like a volcano. The beginning was made by HMIS *Talwar*, a sea shore establishment for training wireless operators. The ship’s ratings were better educated as compared to the other Naval ratings of RIN. The egotistical attitude of the officers, particularly British who were predominant, was further fuelled by the off-the-cuff remarks of the newly arrived Commander King on a routine visit to the ship. He had commented that Indian Ratings were sons of Indian

bitches. When we protested through the official channel we were threatened. The service conditions were pathetic, particularly in contrast to the English Ratings. The last straw on the camel was the breakfast unfit for consumption served to us on February ¹⁸.

Though not inspired by political reasons, the RIN mutiny did have political consequences. It was preceded by the RIAF mutiny and followed by several mutinies in the army, including one at the Signal Training Centre at Jubbulpore. Together, these caused consternation and alarm in Delhi and London. The realisation that Britain could no longer depend on the Indian Armed Forces was partly responsible for her decision to quit India in 1947. Recognising this contribution, the Government of India subsequently agreed to accord the ratings who participated in the mutiny the status of freedom fighters. In June 1973 the government approved the grant of freedom fighters' pension to 476 personnel who had lost their jobs, being dismissed or discharged from service because of their role in the mutiny. ²⁸

Notes

This chapter is largely based on Dilip Kumar Das' *Revisiting Talwar – A Study in the Royal Indian Navy Uprising of February 1946* (New Delhi, 1993); Rear Admiral Satyindra Singh's *Under Two Ensigns – The Indian Navy 1945-1950* (New Delhi, 1986); BC Dutt's *Mutiny of the Innocents* (Bombay, 1971); and 'Report of the Commission of Inquiry – RIN Mutiny 1946' (Ministry of Defence, History Division, New Delhi). Specific references are given below:

1. Report of the Commission of Inquiry – RIN Mutiny 1946, Ministry of Defence, History Division (MODHD), New Delhi, Document 601/7968/1, pp. 20-27.
2. Rear Admiral Satyindra Singh, *Under Two Ensigns – The Indian Navy 1945-1950* (New Delhi, 1986), p. 55.
3. Dilip Kumar Das, *Revisiting Talwar – A Study in the Royal Indian Navy Uprising of February 1946* (New Delhi, 1993), p.63.

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4. Ibid., p.74.
5. Ibid., pp.77-78.
6. Note 1, p.53.
7. Das, note 3, p. 164.
8. Trilochan Singh Trewn, "The lesser-known Mutiny" (Chandigarh), *The Tribune*, 24 February 2002.
9. BC Dutt, *Mutiny of the Innocents* (Bombay, 1971), p.137.
10. Note 1, p. 56.
11. Trewn, note 8.
12. Das, note 3, pp. 217-218, quoting *The Free Press Journal* (Bombay), 22 February 1946.
13. Note 1, p. 59.
14. Ibid., p. 100.
15. Das, note 3, pp. 180-183.
16. Ibid., pp. 187-188.
17. Note 1, pp. 102-104.
18. Ibid., p. 105.
19. Ibid., pp. 106-107.
20. Ibid., pp.109-112.
21. Ibid., p. 113.
22. Ibid., p. 498.
23. Das, note 3, p. 211, quoting *The Free Press Journal* (Bombay), 22 February 1946.
24. Ibid., p.263, quoting Mahatma Gandhi, *Collected Works*, Vol. 83, p. 184.
25. Dutt, note 9, p.109.
26. Das, note 3, p.235.
27. HJS Waraich, "Total Recall – Witness to History" (Chandigarh), *The Sunday Tribune*, 21 March 2004.
28. Singh, note 2, p. 90.

9

The Jubbulpore Mutiny – 1946

The mutiny at Jubbulpore took place between 27 February and 3 March 1946, about two weeks after the naval mutiny at Bombay. The men who participated in the mutiny were all Indian Signal Corps personnel posted at the Signal Training Centre at Jubbulpore (now called Jabalpur). According to official sources, 1,716 men were involved in the mutiny. The immediate provocation for the revolt was the firing on the naval ratings at Bombay and the harsh punishment awarded to the Indian National Army (INA) prisoners after the trials at the Red Fort. The men also had certain grievances concerning pay, food and accommodation that they placed before their superior officers and were agitated when these were not heard. The uprising was peaceful and the participants did not resort to violence of any kind. Like the naval mutiny at Bombay and Karachi, the Jubbulpore revolt was put down with an iron hand, by using British troops. There was no firing, but a bayonet charge that left about 70 men injured, and three dead.

Though the mutiny at Jubbulpore was at that time not considered as 'serious' as the naval mutiny, its repercussions were immense. The earlier revolts in the RIAF and RIN, though more widespread and larger in scale, did not really worry the British authorities, because the Indian Army, on which they depended for meeting external and internal threats, was still considered reliable, having proved its fidelity during World War II. The mutiny at Jubbulpore was the first major uprising in the Indian Army during or after the war. This set alarm bells ringing from Delhi to London, and doubts began

to be expressed on the steadfastness of the Indian Army. Ultimately, it forced Britain to reach a settlement with the political parties and quit India.

After the end of World War II, there was a feeling of uncertainty among soldiers, with the threat of demobilisation and loss of livelihood being matters of serious concern. The return of a large number of troops from British colonies in Southeast Asia aggravated the situation, with military stations in India overwhelmed with troops for whom there was little work and no accommodation. This led to severe overcrowding and a fall in standards of hygiene, food and discipline, the latter due to lack of employment. During the war, most of the men had been serving in operational areas, remaining ignorant or unaware of the political situation in the country. The demands for independence from British rule escalated after the 1942 Quit India agitation, and the end of the war raised expectations in the minds of the public that freedom was imminent. Most of the men went home on leave for the first time after the war, and learned of the momentous political events that had taken place during the last three or four years. The INA trials also played a part in kindling among soldiers “political consciousness”, of which they had no earlier experience.

In February 1946, there were two major establishments of the Indian Signal Corps at Jubbulpore. The first was the Signal Training Centre (STC) comprising No. 1 Signal Training Battalion (Military) and 2 & 3 Signal Battalions (Technical). The second was the Indian Signal Depot & Records, which comprised the Indian Signals Depot; the Indian Signals Demobilisation Centre and the Indian Signals Records. The commandant of the STC was Colonel LC Boyd, while Colonel RTH Gelston commanded the Depot & Records. Both these establishments came under the Jubbulpore Area, commanded by Brigadier HU Richards, who also commanded 17 Indian Infantry Brigade. The area came under the General Officer Commanding Nagpur District, Major General F.H. Skinner, with his headquarters at Nagpur. Headquarters Central Command was then located at Agra.

Conditions at Jubbulpore were no different from those at other military stations, except that the men, being mostly from technical trades, were more

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educated. Many of the men undergoing long training courses were not sure whether they would be retained or sent home in the next few months. The delay in announcement of a clear policy on demobilisation had created an air of uncertainty and restlessness, which could not remain unnoticed. On 27 November 1945, Colonel Boyd had written to the Organisation Directorate in General Headquarters (India), bringing this to their notice. He wrote: ¹

It is for consideration whether the present policy of continuing to put men under lengthy courses of training, irrespective of the time they are likely to remain in the army, is not extremely wasteful both of instructors' time and government..... Among these men unsettlement and lack of interest in their work are already noticeable, since they think they will be released from the Army before their course finishes. It should also be noted that it is the highly educated men such as are enrolled for Group 'A' trades that are keenest to leave the army at the earliest possible moment in order to obtain highly remunerative employment.....To carry on with workshops and operator training in these circumstances seems to be a waste of time. The unsettlement in squads already referred to is having an adverse effect on training ...

It was almost three months before General Headquarters (India), replied to Colonel Boyd's letter, ordering the immediate release of 1,000 recruits then under training at the Indian Signal Training Centre at Jubbulpore and Bangalore.² By the time the orders reached the STC, the mutiny had started. Referring to the letter in his report to the Area Headquarters after the mutiny, Colonel Boyd lamented: "It is unfortunate that the decision contained therein could not have been come to earlier."³

Even if the decision to release the thousand men had been taken earlier, it would have been difficult for the Signal Training Centres to cope with such large numbers. The Signals Depot was then not authorised a demob centre; it was making do with an ad hoc demob centre that had a capacity to release only 70 persons in a day. The staff of the depot was already overworked

and the additional load would have stretched them to the limit. The severe overcrowding and unsatisfactory living conditions only added to the unrest. The shortage of staff affected management of security in the area, and the men had free access to civilian areas. The Signal Training Centre, Depot and Records employed large numbers of civilians, through whom political developments found their way into the military camp and the idle minds of the men, easily converting them into “devils’ workshops”.

At that time, units were given cash to purchase condiments, which were not being supplied with rations. There had been a delay in purchase of condiments with the resultant deterioration in the quality of food being prepared in the *langars* (other ranks messes in the Indian Army are generally called thus. The term is taken from the free kitchen in a *gurudwara*, the place of worship for Sikhs). The personnel responsible for purchasing condiments were often corrupt, and the quantity and quality of condiments was much below the prescribed standards. This applied also to the rations supplied to the men through the supply depot manned by the Royal Indian Army Service Corps. Other than rations, even other stores and amenities authorised to the men were frequently pilfered. The general standard of the men’s cookhouses, living quarters, bathrooms and urinals was poor. Unlike in operational units, there was very little contact between the officers and the men, whose grievances often went unnoticed or unredressed. The quality of viceroy’s commissioned officers (VCOs) and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) posted in instructional appointments in the STC was usually good, but the same could not be said of the supervisory staff responsible for administration, some of whom had been in Jubbulpore for several years, developing a callous attitude towards the men and their problems.

A feature unique to technical arms such as the Indian Signal Corps was the presence of a large number of British soldiers in every unit and establishment. Before the war, most of the technical trades in the Indian Signal Corps were open only to British other ranks (BOR), with Indian other ranks being eligible for the ‘lower’ trades such as operator visual, despatch

rider, lineman, MT driver etc. Before the war, the Indian Signal Corps comprised about 2,000 BOR, with the number of IOR being almost twice that number. When the war ended, the number of BOR had gone up ten times to almost twenty thousand, while the number of IOR had grown thirty times to 60,000. The rapid expansion of the corps necessitated several new trades being opened to Indians, who began to be recruited as mechanics, operators and electricians. By the end of the war, Indians were employed in all jobs that were being done earlier by Europeans, the exception being ciphers, which was not opened to Indians until Independence. Though IOR were now doing the same job as BOR, there was considerable disparity in their status – BOR did not salute viceroy's commissioned officers (VCOs)—salaries, rations and living conditions. This naturally irked the Indians, who saw no reason for this discrimination.

A seemingly inconsequential cause for discontent was the bad quality of *gur* (jaggery) being supplied to the troops by resorting to local purchase. This had been officially reported to the Centre Headquarters on 25 February 1946. However, the decision on the complaint or the progress was not communicated to the men. On 26 February a number of notices were seen pasted on the company notice boards in the lines of the Demob Centre and No. 4 Depot Company. Some notices had 'Jai Hind' written on them, while others called upon all Indian other ranks to cease work and, if necessary, shed blood. The notices were seen in the morning by Lieutenant Colonel E.W. Anderson, officer commanding Indian Signals Depot, who reported this to the Commandant, Colonel R.T.H. Geltson. Viewing the situation as serious, Colonel Gelston immediately sought an interview with the area commander, to report on an "intelligence" matter. At 3 pm, Colonel Gelston and Lieutenant Colonel Anderson met the Area Commander and apprised him of the notices. In the evening, all officers were called for a conference and explained the developments. At about 6 pm, all IOR of Records were paraded and the Company Commander, Captain DS Garewal, addressed them, in the presence of Lieutenant Colonel Anderson and the Officer in Charge Records,

Lieutenant Colonel CM Macdonald. The men were calm during the address, and there was no untoward incident.

The mutiny started at about 9.20 am on 27 February 1946 in 'G' Company of No. 2 Signal Training Battalion. The first works parade was held at 7 am as usual, and the men were drilled. All officers attended the parade which ended at about 8.30 am, when everyone broke off for breakfast. Soon after breakfast, about 200 men, mainly workshop trainees, formed up in the lines of the unit, just before the second works parade was due to fall in. Most of them were in uniform, carrying flags of the Congress and Muslim League. They formed a procession and marched out of the unit, shouting slogans of "Jai Hind" and "Inquilab Zindabad". The Senior Viceroy Commissioned Officer of the unit, Subedar Major and Honorary Captain Ahmed Khan, asked them to halt, but they did not listen to him. Khan immediately telephoned the Adjutant, who was having breakfast in the Officers Mess. The adjutant told the subedar major that Major CC Tucker, the officiating commanding officer, had left the mess about five minutes earlier and he should await his arrival in the office. He also informed Major D.C. Dashfield and Captain J Knowles, company commander and training officer respectively of 'G' Company, who were in the mess with him. Collecting another officer, Captain MB Myers, they left for the unit area on bicycles.

Information about the crowd collecting and shouting slogans in front of the guard room of No 2 Signal Training Battalion had also reached Colonel Gelston, whose office was located just a hundred yards away. Gelston saw the crowd leave the unit area and move along Peter's Path, which led towards No. 3 Signal Training Battalion and the Signals Depot. He telephoned the Area Headquarters and also the depot, warning them that that the crowd might come that way. The Depot Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Anderson, was then in his bungalow. When Gelston rang him up, he told him that he had called for a 15-cwt. vehicle and was planning to come to his office, to report that notices had again been seen during the morning parade. Gelston informed Anderson of the developments, and asked him to pick him up from his office, so that they could both go and see what was happening.

Meanwhile, the procession was proceeding on Peter's Path, along Napier Road to the lines of No. 3 Signal Training Battalion. Major Tucker was cycling to his office when he met the crowd. Having failed in his attempt to stop them, he cycled ahead and warned No. 3 Signal Training Battalion of their approach. The four officers of No. 2 Signal Training Battalion had also reached the unit, and the adjutant telephoned No. 3 Signal Training Battalion. Major Dashfield and Captain Knowles got into a 3-ton lorry and drove towards the crowd at full speed. Having been warned of the approach of the procession, No. 3 Signal Training Battalion had turned out its guard. But the crowd brushed it aside, and entered the unit area, sweeping Major Tucker off his bicycle. When Major Dashfield and Captain Knowles caught up with him, he ordered them to go after the crowd and halt them. Noticing that the crowd was about to leave 3 Signal Training Battalion near the Boys' Company, they halted the truck and went towards the mob. When Major Dashfield asked them to stop, one of them said, "We have demands". Captain Knowles, who had his back towards the crowd, was hit three times by stones. Enveloping the officers, the crowd continued on its way.

Colonel Gelston and Lieutenant Colonel Anderson reached the crowd as they were coming out of No. 3 Signal Training Battalion. They were soon joined by Major Dashfield and Captain Knowles. The four officers got out of their vehicles and tried to stop the men, who just rushed past them and marched through the depot. They were very excited and seemed completely out of hand, shouting slogans and waving party flags. Lieutenant Colonel Anderson kept moving with the head of the column while Colonel Gelston got in the truck and asked the driver to start. The truck was soon surrounded by the mutineers and some even tried to get in. Gelston ordered the driver to keep moving forward slowly. At one stage the driver's foot slipped off the pedal and the truck bounded forward, knocking over two men. Due to the heavy rush, even Anderson was almost run over. After this, the truck was stopped and Anderson got in. Both officers then made their way to the depot.

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Realising that they would not be able to stop the procession on their own, Lieutenant Colonel Anderson collected about 15 men and issued them with rifles. He also armed Dashfield and Knowles with pistols and the party moved in a lorry towards the procession, which had already passed through the depot. Overtaking the crowd on the Outram Road about 200 yards from the Nerbudda Junction, they halted the lorry with the men keeping their rifles at the aim. The officers dismounted and Anderson threatened to shoot if the men did not stop. Hearing this, the men in the crowd bared their chests and dared him to open fire. The three officers were literally thrust out of the way and the crowd turned off the Nerbudda Road towards Gorakhpur and headed for the city.

Two viceroy's commissioned officers of 'G' Company followed the crowd and attempted to find out their complaints. The main grievances of the men were: ⁴

- Differences in pay between IORs & BORS.
- Poor quality of rations.
- Why was fire opened on RIN ratings?
- Why were two INA officers sentenced to seven years RI when others were merely cashiered?

Undeterred by the attempts to stop them the crowd proceeded towards the city. Having reached Tilak Bhumi, Tillaya, they stopped and held a meeting, where speeches were made by some of the men highlighting their grievances. There was a lot of slogan shouting and waving of flags of Congress and Muslim League. Some of them went to the local office of the Congress Party and sought the help of the local political leaders. An officer from the Intelligence Branch of Area Headquarters and some officers from the Signal Training Centre also went to the venue in civil dress and noted down the names of the prominent persons taking an active part in the meeting and discussions.

The news of the incident spread quickly. There was considerable tension in the city and shopkeepers closed their shops. However, the meeting was peaceful and there was no violence or unruly behaviour by the men. At about

4.15 pm, they started back for the unit. By this time the military authorities had mobilised two companies of 27 Jat and two ID (Internal Disturbance) companies of the Signal Training Centre in case force was required to carry out arrests. But the crowd entered the lines peacefully and sat down in the battalion area. The troops earmarked for effecting arrests were therefore asked to stand down. The ID companies, which had taken over the main guard, *kot* (armoury) and magazine guard were later relieved by the Jat troops. The “ring-leaders”, whose names had been noted down by the area intelligence officer and by other officers from the Signal Training Centre, were asked to fall out when their names were called, which they did without any protest. Major CC Tucker, the officiating commanding officer of No. 2 Signal Training Battalion, ordered a viceroy’s commissioned officer to march the ringleaders to the main quarter guard. Sensing what was going to happen next, the others pulled them back into the crowd.

Soon afterwards, the Commandant, Colonel L.C. Boyd arrived, followed by the area commander, who addressed the men. He told them that they were all under arrest, but assured them that he would forward their grievances to higher authorities. They fell in and were marched to the Signal Training Centre Cage where the commandant noted down their demands, which were as under:⁵

- Increase of basic pay.
- Increase of rations.
- Better accommodation.
- Equal treatment with British other ranks.
- Speedier demobilisation.
- Protest against speeches of the commander-in-chief and Admiral Godfrey - the passage that if Indian Army soldiers are indisciplined every force would be used against them.
- Release of all INA prisoners including Captain Rashid and Burhanuddin.
- Unnecessary to spend one crore on victory celebrations when there is food crisis in India.

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- Ready to work if the demands are put forward. We did no indiscipline while out. Pray no action against us.

After taking down their grievances the commandant spoke to the men and left. When the afternoon parade was dismissed a number of men of No. 2 Signal Training Battalion approached the cage and started milling around shouting words of encouragement. Those who wished to join their friends inside the cage were allowed to do so and the rest were ordered to return, which they did. After dark, the same thing occurred. The men inside the cage refused food and bedding. When the commandant came to know of this, he entered the cage and spoke to the men, after which they agreed to eat food and accepted bedding. Apart from sporadic slogans, the night passed without incident.

By early next morning, a British battalion, the Somerset Light Infantry had arrived in Jubbulpore. A party of about 80 men from No. 2 Signal Training Battalion assembled in the unit at 7 am and began moving along the same route that had been taken by their colleagues on the previous day, but before they could cover any substantial distance, they were intercepted by a platoon of the British battalion. When addressed by various officers, a few of them agreed to return to work but the remainder were left on the roadside under the guard of British troops.

At 9 am, No. 2 Signal Training Battalion was paraded. Major Tucker and Colonel Boyd addressed the men and asked them to return to work. Though the men remained orderly they refused, saying that they could not do so because their comrades were in custody. If they were let out, they would all go back to work. They were asked to return to their lines and remain quiet, which they readily agreed to do. At about 10 am, personnel of No. 3 Signal Training Battalion became restive, and about 100 men joined the clerks of the Records and sat down with them, demanding the release of the men inside the cage. Some officers and viceroy's commissioned officers tried to talk them out of this demand, but very few responded. A few men from the ID companies who had been asked to stand down took off their equipment and joined the crowd.

The Jubbulpore Mutiny – 1946

The District Commander, Major General Skinner arrived to get a first hand account of the events. In consultation with the area commander and the commandant Signal Training Centre, a plan was made to arrest the ringleaders. The officiating commanding officer and the subedar major would enter the cage to reason with the men and try to effect the arrests placidly. If this were to fail, then the ringleaders would be pointed out to the company commander of the Somerset Light Infantry, who would make the arrests forcibly. Major Tucker, Lieutenant Waugh and Subedar Major Khan entered the cage and reasoned with the men for over an hour without success. The second-in-command of 27 Jat and Lieutenant Colonel Poonose, an Indian officer who had been called from Katni, then entered the cage and spent another hour, but failed to induce the ringleaders to give themselves up. There was no recourse left except the use of force.

About 80 soldiers of the Somerset Light Infantry entered the cage, with bayonets fixed on their rifles. A few of the men were physically removed, amidst a lot of shouting. Faced with the bayonets of the British troops, the crowd retreated to one corner of the cage, which gave way under the weight of sheer numbers. A large number managed to escape through the gap, while the remainder were involved a scuffle with the British troops. Many sustained injuries from bayonets and some were trampled in the stampede. The injured were immediately removed to the hospital. Some of the men who escaped rushed towards the city but others who were very frightened hid in huts in the lines or in the local countryside. Information about the escapees was conveyed to the police and the civil authorities, with a request to arrest them and bring them back at the earliest.

The news of the bayonet charge spread like wild fire in the Signal Training Centre and at many places the men came out and demonstrated against this, resulting in some more arrests. At 6 pm, 14 men returned voluntarily, followed by some more in smaller groups of two or three. They were all placed under arrest and put in the guardroom. At about 7.30 pm, information was received from the local police that about 200 men who had been rounded up

by them were being returned in police lorries. The district commander and commandant Signal Training Centre met these men when they arrived. The injured were sent to the hospital while the rest were sent to the Jat lines. Meanwhile, about 100 men of No. 3 Signal Training Battalion continued to sit in the Records lines.

While events had taken a serious turn in the Signal Training Centre on 28 February 1946, things were far from normal in the Depot and Records. In the morning about 200 clerks of the Records collected near 4 Company lines and marched towards the Depot Battalion. The Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Anderson, turned out his Internal Defence Company and followed them, accompanied by his second-in-command and Captain D.S. Garewal of Signals Records. They met the crowd of mutineers on the bridge near the Indian Military Hospital. A column of the Somerset Light Infantry had also arrived and was lined up on the Outram Road opposite the hospital. Lieutenant Colonel Anderson spoke to the men and asked them what they wanted. On being told that they had several grievances he asked them to return to their lines and hand over their grievances, which he promised to take up with the authorities. After some hesitation they agreed and followed him to the lines, where they sat down and narrated their grievances, which were noted down and handed over to the area commander when he arrived soon afterwards to address the men. Lieutenant Colonel Anderson again spoke to the men and asked them to return to work but they refused.

A company of the Somerset Light Infantry had been placed around the lines of No. 4 Company. With the help of some British soldiers, the brigade major of 17 Indian Infantry Brigade, Major KB Langdon, arrested four Indian other ranks who were then marched away. After these arrests and the departure of the area commander, about 100 men of No. 3 Signal Training Battalion rushed into the 4 Company lines and joined the mutineers, accompanied by a lot of shouting. Lieutenant Colonel CM Macdonald, the officer-in-charge Records and Captain Macfarlane, adjutant No. 3 Signal Training Battalion, tried to quieten the men. After about ten minutes the

newly arrived recruits sat down behind the mutineers already seated there. Some more officers from No. 3 Signal Training Battalion arrived and tried to persuade their men to return to their lines but failed. The total number of mutineers present in No.4 Company had now swelled to almost 350. The Commandant Indian Signals Depot and Records, Colonel Gelston spoke to them about their grievances and promised to do all that could be done to remove them. The men also demanded the release of the four men arrested earlier and the removal of British troops. At 4 pm, the British troops were withdrawn without any visible reaction from the mutineers. The night of 28 February passed off without any further incident.

In the early hours of 1 March 1946, about 150 other ranks from 3 Signal Training Battalion left their lines and marched in a procession towards Sadar Bazar, shouting slogans and waving flags. This information was conveyed to Area Headquarters, which ordered a company from Somerset Light Infantry to proceed to the garrison ground, where the crowd was reported to have been headed for. At 7.30 am, the Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel R.B.S. Eraut, the Adjutant, Captain Facfarlane and Jemadar Natesan, a Madrassi Mussalman interpreter, proceeded to the Garrison Ground but found no trace of the procession. Colonel Eraut went to the Area Headquarters, while Captain Facfarlane and Jemadar Natesan searched for the crowd in the city and the cantonment, without success. On their return to the unit, they discovered that 24 men from the Internal Disturbance Company had joined the procession. The Commanding Officer ordered the Internal Disturbance Company to stand down, and the British guard to take over.

At about 9 am, information was received that the procession was coming back in an endeavour to mobilise the remainder of the unit. The commanding officer positioned a few officers and viceroy's commissioned officers to meet the procession when it reached the lines and divert them to the football ground. The commandant reached the unit shortly before the arrival of the procession at 9.45 am. Efforts to guide them to the football ground failed and they moved towards the staging camp. They were stopped en route and the

commanding officer began to address them. At first he was shouted down but eventually succeeded in making them sit down and listen. The commandant then addressed the men and listened to their points. Since it was the morning break the rest of No. 3 Signal Training Battalion also gathered round to listen. After the commandant left for the Area Headquarters, the commanding officer ordered the unit to parade for normal work. This order was not immediately obeyed but after about twenty minutes all the men less the demonstrators returned to work. At about 11.30 am, Lieutenant Colonel Poonoose arrived and addressed the men for over an hour, after which a few of them returned to work. It appeared that many more were willing but were being prevented by the leaders.

At about 13.15 pm, the Subedar Major reported to the commanding officer that the demonstrators were requesting permission to go to the cook house and have their food, and promised to return to normal duties after that. The commanding officer agreed making it clear that the normal course of military law would be followed. Shortly after this, the subedar major accompanied by 11 men left for the Records lines in order to persuade the party of mutineers from No. 3 Signal Training Battalion who were sitting there to return. He came back after 30 minutes and reported that he had not only failed in convincing the mutineers but had lost two men of this party, who had been persuaded to join them. After lunch, all the men except for those still in Records attended the afternoon works parade.

The situation in No. 4 Company of Records on 1 March continued to be tense. Captain Garewal, the company commander attended the first works parade at 8 am and found only two men present. The mutineers were still sitting between the first and second barracks, where they had been the previous day. Most of them were seated in orderly ranks, with a few standing around and talking. At about 10.30 pm, they became noisy and began to form a procession, taking down several Congress and Muslim League flags from the open ground between the barracks and the road where they had been erected the previous day. However, there were many among them who shouted to the

men to stay in the lines, and the procession broke up into small groups. At about midday, the flags were reerected. Shortly afterwards, a deputation led by the subedar major of No. 3 Signal Training Battalion arrived to persuade their men to return. There was a heated discussion followed by a lot of pulling and pushing, and some men were physically prevented from going back.

At the second works parade, not a single man fell in on the parade ground. The officer-in-charge records was informed that some men would go to work individually but were afraid to come to the parade ground. At about 4.15 pm, Colonel Gelston and Lieutenant Colonel Poonoose arrived and met the men. Poonoose spoke to men with all officers present, and later alone. At 5.45 pm, Colonel Gelston and Lieutenant Colonel Poonoose left to meet the area commander. At the roll call parade at 6 pm, 41 men were present. The rest of the men were still sitting between the two barracks, but were quiet.

The previous day's incidents had been reported in several newspapers and there was considerable resentment at the bayonet charge on the Indian soldiers. According to the newspapers, three men had been killed, while 70 were injured in the bayonet charge. The District Magistrate, Mr. ES Hyde declared Jubbulpore Cantonment a restricted area, and the entry of civilians was banned. Notices to this effect were pasted at prominent places and also announced by the beat of drum. Headquarters Jubbulpore Area had also issued instructions confining all troops to lines. Another infantry battalion, the First Royal Gurkha Rifles (1 RGR) had also arrived.

On 2 March 1946, Lieutenant Colonel Poonoose again spoke to the mutineers in Records and No.3 Signal Training Battalion. He reported that he had failed to make any headway and found that some men who had appeared to be amenable the previous day were now obdurate. During the day, a message from Major General F.H. Skinner, general officer commanding Nagpur District was read out to all ranks, in English and Urdu. Making it clear that the action of the men who had collectively absented themselves from their lines without permission amounted to mutiny, it went on to assure that there would be no mass punishment and "justice would be tempered with

mercy". The message also appreciated the conduct of those who had remained staunch to their duty in the "face of provocation and bad example".⁶

During the day, conditions improved. In No. 2 Signal Training Battalion, all men reported for the first works parade except for nine, who also reported after half an hour. In No. 3 Signal Training Battalion all men resumed duties except for the 100 men in Records and those detained in the Jat lines. Major Dashfield visited the Jat lines with some viceroy's commissioned officers and tried to bring back some of the men, but they refused to come unless the ringleaders were released as well. Colonel Gelston and Lieutenant Colonel Poonoose visited the mutineers in Records in the morning at 7.30 am. Poonoose spoke to them for about half an hour but found them in the same frame of mind. He noticed that some men whom he had spoken to the previous day were missing, and suspected that they had been forcibly prevented from attending his talk.

At 12.30 pm, Captain Garewal read out the district commander's message, twice in Urdu and once in English, using a public address system. Everyone heard this in silence. During the afternoon, all was quiet and there was no shouting of slogans. At the evening roll call, 268 men were present. At 9 pm, the mutineers announced that they were willing to end the mutiny. They burned their flags and started reporting at the office, where their names were noted down. The 100 men of No. 3 Signal Training battalion returned to their lines. By 11 pm, it appeared that all mutineers had surrendered, except the ones in the Jat lines.

On 3 March 1946, a roll call parade was held in all the units at 9 am. Immediately afterwards, some ringleaders were arrested and sent to the Jat lines. The troops of 17 Indian Infantry Brigade had placed a cordon around the lines. The area commander and commandant Signal Training Centre visited the mutineers in the Jat lines. They said that they were willing to come back if all of them were released. The ringleaders among them had been segregated and without them, the others refused to return to their units. During the next two days, the situation improved, but was still far from normal. The men in the Jat lines refused to come out until their leaders were released. There were

no incidents on 4 and 5 March and normal parades were held in the units. On 7 March, all the men in the Jat lines returned. On reaching their units, they staged a protest for the release of the ringleaders, threatening to go on strike again if this was not done. However, the threat did not materialise and there were no untoward incidents after 7 March 1946. The mutiny was over.

The mutiny had shocked the military establishment, especially the British officers who had always believed that the Indian soldier would never rebel. The reasons for the disaffection were quickly analysed and remedial measures taken. The district commander issued instructions to all concerned to improve the standard of food and accommodation. Lieutenant Colonel Cassani from the Welfare General's Branch visited the lines of the Indian Signals Depot on 6 March 1946, and submitted a detailed report at General Headquarters (India). The report brought to light the pathetic conditions under which the Indian troops lived. After it was found that some officers, viceroy's commissioned officers and non-commissioned officers had spent almost eight to ten years at Jubbulpore, those who had been there for over two years were immediately posted out. The number of Indian officers was increased, so that they could understand the problems of the Indian troops.

Disciplinary action taken against those who participated in the mutiny was severe and swift. Those against whom there was even the slightest inkling were punished. Most of them were charged under Indian Army Act Section 27 (a) – “joining, exciting, causing or conspiring in a mutiny” – and Army Act Section 27 (b) – “being present at a mutiny and not using his utmost endeavours to suppress the same.” In all, 85 men were found to have been actively involved in the mutiny. Eighteen men were tried by a summary general court martial, of whom 15 were sentenced to dismissal and imprisonment ranging from one to three years, with three being acquitted. Seven men were dismissed without trial and 19 discharged without terminal benefits. In addition, 41 were discharged from service on administrative grounds – services no longer required - without any enquiry or investigation. Many more were sent home merely on suspicion and the statements of viceroy's and non-commissioned

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officers that were considered loyal by British officers. Most of these men had put in long years of service and fought in World War II. They did not get any pension or gratuity, and many lived and died in penury. Their pleas for redress fell on deaf ears as instructions were also issued not to entertain any petition or appeal unless Army Headquarters recommended it. Old records contain several letters that bring out the pathetic state of these unfortunate soldiers, who had remained true to their salt and helped the British win the World War II. Having implicit faith in the British sense of fair play and justice, they were surprised and disappointed at the treatment they received at the hands of the Government of the day.

Though bad food and living conditions were the major reasons behind the mutiny at Jubbulpore, it had a political tinge right from the beginning. The firing on the naval ratings at Bombay and the punishments awarded to the officers of the Indian National Army were included in the list of grievances given by the mutineers on the first day itself. Throughout the revolt, the participants carried flags of the Congress and the Muslim League and shouted slogans such as 'Jai Hind' and 'Inquilab Zindabad'. On 27 and 28 February, they contacted local political leaders and sought their help. The local Congress leaders visited the mutineers under detention in the Jat lines and persuaded them to give up their resistance. They were shown a letter from Maulana Azad, the Congress president, asking them to resume work.⁷

During a press conference on 3 March 1946, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru referred to the Jubbulpore mutiny, and said, "...the men ... have remained completely peaceful...The demands were for better treatment in regard to rations, amenities etc, and equality of treatment between Indian and British soldiers. There were also some political demands... Such demands should not normally be made on the basis of a strike... We have seen recently strikes by American and British servicemen."⁸

Seth Govind Das of the Congress Party raised the matter in the Central Assembly in Delhi on 15 March 1946. In his reply, the War Secretary, Mr. Philip Mason gave the official version of the case. According to him, 1,716

persons were involved in the mutiny. He accepted that 35 persons had been wounded, of whom eight had bayonet wounds, with the remainder having minor injuries from barbed wire or contusions. Only two persons were seriously injured and there were no deaths. However, he denied that there was any firing or bayonet charge. According to him, some persons had sustained bayonet wounds when they attempted to overpower the troops that had been called in to arrest the ringleaders. Mr. Ahmad Jaffar of the Muslim League suggested that a couple of members of the Defence Consultative Committee should be associated with the inquiry, but this was rejected by the war secretary, who contended that this was a service inquiry under the Indian Army Act, and it would be quite illegal to associate non-officials.⁹

The army mutiny at Jubbulpore followed the mutinies in the Royal Indian Air Force and the Royal Indian Navy. It is pertinent to remember that one of the compelling reasons for the departure of the British from India was the apprehension that the loyalty of Indian armed forces was doubtful. Due to obvious reason, the staunchness of the Army was more worrisome than that of the other two Services. On 5 September 1946, in a note by the commander-in-chief on the military aspects of the plan to withdraw from India, General Auchinleck was to record, “The importance of keeping the Indian Army steady is emphasised. It is the one disciplined force in which communal interests are subordinated to duty, and on it depends the stability of the country. The steadiness of the RIN and the RIAF is of lesser import but any general disaffection in them is likely seriously to affect the reliability of the army.”¹⁰

The mutiny in the Signal Training Centre and the Indian Signal Corps Depot and Records at Jubbulpore was the only major uprising in the Indian Army after the end of World War II. It was also the last uprising by soldiers under the British Raj. In a sense, it was the proverbial ‘last straw’ that broke the camel’s back. Fearful of the effect it might have on the rest of the army, news about the mutiny was deliberately suppressed. Having occurred in a small town, it was almost ignored by the national newspapers based in Delhi and Bombay. The Corps of Signals also chose to ignore the mutiny, even after

Independence, and old timers talked about it only in hushed voices. Many officers were worried about the stigma associated with a mutiny, which has always been regarded as the most heinous of military offences. The fact that the Corps of Signals continued to be headed by a British officer up to 1954 may have played a part in this. Strangely enough, no record of the Jubbulpore mutiny exists in the National Archives or the Historical Section of the Ministry of Defence. As a result, it has been ignored by military historians as well those who have written about the freedom struggle. The men involved in the mutiny have also suffered – unlike the participants in the naval mutiny, they have not been classified as freedom fighters.

Notes

This chapter is largely based on N. Mansergh and Penderel Moon's *The Transfer of Power* (London, 1982); Lt Gen. S.L. Menezes' *Fidelity and Honour* (New Delhi, 1993); and various files and documents in the Corps of Signals Museum, Jabalpur. Specific references are given below:

1. STC to GHQ (I), 27 November 1945, Signals Museum (SM), Jabalpur, 242-C, fol. 94.
2. GHQ (I) to Comdt. ISC Depot & Records, 21 February 1946, (SM), 242-C, fol.92.
3. STC to Jubbulpore Area, 9 March 1946, (SM), 242-C, fol.93.
4. STC to Jubbulpore Area, 27 February 1946, (SM), 242-C, fol.134
5. Appx. 'B' to STC to Jubbulpore Area, 8 March 1946, (SM), 242-C, fol.95.
6. Richards to Boyd, Gelston and Anderson, 1 March 1946, (SM), 242-C, fol. 58.
7. Dipak Kumar Das, *Revisiting Talwar* (Delhi, 1993), p. 294.
- 8 Lt Gen. S.L. Menezes, *Fidelity and Honour* (New Delhi, 1993), p. 404.
9. Statement of Mr. Philip Mason, ICS, war secretary, in the Central Legislative Assembly on 15 March 1946.
10. N. Mansergh and Penderel Moon (ed.), *The Transfer of Power* (12 vols, London, 1982), vol. viii, p.462.

10

Nationalism in the Armed Forces

The British arrived in India as traders in the middle of the 17th century and it was only a hundred years later that they began to recruit Indians as soldiers, leading to the birth of the Indian Army. In fact, the French had begun recruiting Indians to supplement their forces in southern India even earlier. Due to prolonged hostilities between Britain and France, neither nation could spare adequate troops from the homeland and had to depend on local levies to protect their possessions in India from predatory attacks from each other. With time, Indian soldiers began to be used in conflicts with Indian rulers, and the consequent expansion of the territory under the control of the East India Company. In 1757, Robert Clive defeated Siraj-ud-Daula at Plassey with the help of Indian soldiers who had been trained and equipped in the European fashion. Shortly afterwards, the Mughal emperor conferred on the East India Company the *diwani* (authority to collect revenue) of Bengal Bihar and Orissa. With this, the Company's main occupation changed from trading to governance. This also conferred on the Company's rule over the provinces a measure of legality.¹

For almost 200 years after Plassey, Indian soldiers helped the British in establishing their dominion over India and fighting their wars across the borders and high seas. The majority of the men who volunteered to serve under British officers did so for the pay, perquisites and status. Most of these men came from families with a tradition of soldiering, whose forefathers had served in the armies of their native chieftains even before the arrival of the British. Almost the whole of the Bengal Army before 1857 comprised

Brahmins and Rajputs from Oudh, known colloquially as *Purbias* (men from the East). Many *Purbias* also served in the Scindia's army that fought British forces under Arthur Wellesley in 1803 at Assaye and at Laswari, after the battle of Delhi. In these engagements, the *Purbias* fought with distinction from both sides, just as they would have under the flags of local chieftans. At that time and even later, Indian soldiers readily joined any army where the pay was good and their religion and caste were respected. Soldiers from foreign lands also found military service in India attractive, and often proved more trustworthy than the natives. The Afghan bodyguard of Rani Laxmi Bai of Jhansi remained with her till the end in 1858, displaying commendable courage and gallantry.

Though large parts of the subcontinent had been unified under the Mughals, the concept of nationalism as understood today did not exist. The army of Aurnagzeb, the last of the Great Mughals, comprised 300,000 cavalry and 600,000 foot soldiers. However, very few of these were imperial troops. Each of the 15 or 16 *rajās* (chieftains) who fought under his flag brought along 25,000 horsemen or foot soldiers or a combination of the two. These soldiers owed allegiance not to the Mughal emperor but to their own *rajā*, who paid their salaries. Soldiers from princely states such as Jodhpur or Jaipur, though fighting under the Mughal flag, had no feeling of nationalism or patriotism, such as what they displayed when their own lands or kingdoms were threatened. The stories of the gallantry displayed by Rajput soldiers during the three attacks on Chittor are the stuff of legend. Knowing that they would not survive, the men rode out to die at the hands of the enemy after their women had committed *jauhar* (collective self-immolation). The readiness of these soldiers to die for their land and their king was a manifestation of their loyalty and devotion, akin to what is known today as nationalism.

After the decline of the Mughal Empire, the next unification occurred almost a hundred years later, when British control extended to almost the whole of India. With the gradual reduction or disappearance of the armies of native princes, it was only under the British that Indians had the opportunity

for military service. The soldier in the Company's army was not fired by patriotism of the kind felt when fought for his liege lord. Nevertheless, he served loyally because he had to be true to his salt. In return for providing him with a means of livelihood, the Company was entitled to his allegiance. By and large, the Indian soldier did not betray the trust of his British masters. But when his religion or caste was under threat, he had no compunction in turning against his officers. On their part, the British took pains to permit the native soldier the greatest latitude in observing his customs and prejudices. On the rare occasions when they failed to do so, the result was catastrophic, as happened in 1857.

The status of the Indian soldier during the British Raj has been the subject of debate among historians and political leaders. There are many who feel that Indians who served in the army under British rule were mercenaries. This was the reason cited by many soldiers for joining the Indian National Army after their capture by the Japanese during World War II. As already mentioned, during the period of British rule the Indian soldier readily joined any army where the pay was good and his religions and caste not under threat. This applied to soldiers serving under the British as well as Indian princes. The example of *Purbias* in the Scindia's army has already been cited. It is interesting to recall that the primary reason that impelled most British soldiers to serve in India was the attraction of prize money, which was shared among all ranks after a victory. The British system of prize money was an euphemism for institutionalised robbery and plunder of the wealth of the vanquished by the victor. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, after the recapture of Delhi by the British forces in 1858, the booty collected by the prize agents was worth a million and a quarter sterling. If anything, the British soldier serving in India was more of a mercenary than his native colleague.

After the grant of the *diwani* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1765, the status of the East India Company became that of a vassal of the Mughal emperor. The right to collect revenue automatically conferred the responsibility for administration, including maintenance of law and order, for which the

requirement of an army was indisputable. Legally, the British were no longer foreign intruders but local chieftains, acting on behalf of the Mughal court. Viewed from this angle, the company's army was similar to those maintained by other native rulers. Naturally, soldiers who opted to serve in such an army could not be termed as mercenaries. In fact, in 1922 a British historian, FW Buckler, presented a paper on the Mutiny of 1857 at the Royal Historical Society, in which he expressed the legal view that it was the Company, as the *dewan* of the Mughal emperor that had mutinied against the Emperor Bahadur Shah. ²

After 1857, the responsibility for governing India was taken over by the British government. With this, the status of the British in India also changed. India was now a colony, a part of the mighty British Empire and the "brightest jewel in the Crown" of the British monarch. Even in during this period, it is doubtful if Indian soldiers serving under the British can be called mercenaries. By definition, a mercenary soldier fights for money or reward for a country other than his own. Though Indian soldiers served under British officers, it is a debatable point if they were fighting for a country other than their own. While the Indian mutiny in 1857 was to a considerable extent inspired by the desire to free of British rule, the concept of nationalism among the general public took root only after the birth of the Congress at the turn of the century and flowered only after the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 and the Quit India Movement in 1942.

Britain depended on the Indian Army to maintain her control over India. As a result, Indian troops were frequently employed to control disturbances inspired by the freedom struggle. This sometimes brought them into conflict with their compatriots, who questioned their lack of patriotism and branded them as mercenaries. However, it is pertinent to record that from the time the British government assumed the responsibility for governing India, the primary role of the Indian Army was the defence of India against invasion from the north-west, with Russia or Afghanistan being the most likely adversaries. After World War I the size of the Indian Army had to be drastically reduced

due to financial constraints and a reduction in the external threat. In 1921, the Central Legislative Assembly discussed the role of the Indian Army and determined that it should not be used for imperial campaigns outside India. But it was naïve to expect that if the need arose, Britain would hesitate to call upon the resources of the largest and richest colony of the Empire. In 1933, the War Office spelt out the role of the Indian Army in the following words:

The duties of the army in India include the preservation of internal security in India, the covering of the lines of internal communication, and the protection of India against external attack. Though the scale of forces is not calculated to meet external attack by a great power, their duties might well comprise the initial resistance to such an attack pending the arrival of imperial reinforcements.³

The role of the Indian Army was thus enhanced from being purely for the defence of India to include a supplementary role of acting as an Imperial Reserve. The British government agreed to grant an annual subsidy of 1.5 million pounds to the Government of India for this purpose. By 1938, the threat of war had become clear and the Government of India requested London to reconsider both the military and financial aspects of her defence problems, and conclude a fresh contract between Britain and India in which the latter's financial limitations were recognised. The Imperial Defence Committee constituted a sub-committee under Major General Henry Pownall to report on the defence problems of India. The Pownall committee reported that the changed strategic situation and development of modern armaments, particularly air forces, warranted a more important role for India in defence of vital areas on the imperial lines of communication in the Middle and Far East. It recommended the unconditional allocation of one Indian division as a strategic reserve for use of the Imperial Government wherever required. Based on this, the Imperial defence Council issued the 1938 Plan (Document No B-43746) which envisaged six tasks for the defence forces of India viz.

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defence of the western frontier against external aggression; defence of land frontiers other than the western frontier; maintenance of law and order and the suppression of disorder and rebellion; safeguarding strategic lines of communication within India; provision of a general reserve with mobile components; and provision of forces for possible employment overseas at the request of the government in the UK.

It is pertinent to note that the primary responsibility of the Indian Army – defence of India – never changed. The employment of Indian troops overseas was covered by a formal contract between the governments of UK and India. Troops are often sent overseas in accordance with treaties, contracts or agreements between two countries. Sometimes, such help is extended even without the existence of formal treaties. Troops from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India fought for Britain in World War II in accordance with agreements and contracts between these nations. To counter the threat of the Axis powers, nations such as UK, France, Russia, China and USA made temporary alliances and fought as allies. Even after independence, India has continued to assist other nations who have asked for military assistance in controlling internal problems. Examples are the dispatch of Indian troops to Maldives and Sri Lanka in the Eighties. In recent years, troops from several nations have participated in the operations in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Kuwait and Iraq. These troops cannot be termed mercenaries, since they fought in foreign lands not of their own volition but at the behest of their respective countries. The Indian soldiers who were sent abroad during the British Raj did not volunteer for foreign service in an individual capacity; they were sent for assignments abroad by their employers viz. the Government of India.

Apart from the Indian soldiers in the regular army, troops from the forces maintained by Indian princely states also formed part of the contingents sent for Imperial service during both World Wars. According to the Imperial Service Troops Scheme of 1888, specific units were earmarked for imperial purposes and organised to Indian Army establishments. In 1914, the strength

of the Imperial Service troops was 22,613. Ultimately, 20 mounted regiments and 13 battalions were offered for service during World War I. During World War II, the assistance provided by Indian princely states was significantly higher. In 1945, there were 41,463 soldiers from Indian State Forces in Indian government service out of a total of 99,367, which was more than 40 percent of their strength. ⁴

The assistance provided by India to Britain during World War II was not gratis. The Modernisation Committee under Major General Claude Auchinleck set up in 1938 was followed by the Expert Committee on Defence of India under Admiral of the Fleet, Lord Alfred Chatfield in 1939. When World War II started, various measures recommended by these committees had just been taken in hand. To meet the cost of modernisation and increase India's output of explosives and ammunition, the British Government made a grant of 25 million pounds and a loan of 9 million pounds. Shortly after the outbreak of the war, an agreement was signed between London and New Delhi on the sharing of cost of Indian forces utilized for imperial defence. According to the Defence Expenditure Agreement of November 1939, India was committed to contributing to the total expenditure a sum equivalent to her normal peace-time expenditure on defence plus the cost of operations undertaken in defence of purely Indian interests and a share of the measures undertaken jointly in the interests of Indian and Imperial Defence. Everything over and above this would be met by Britain. By the time the war ended, Britain's debt to India was more than 1,000 million pounds. ⁵

Indian soldiers played an important role in Britain's victory over her adversaries in World War I and II, during which they fought valiantly in theatres around the globe, suffering substantial casualties and earning many gallantry awards. At the same time, the struggle for independence from British rule continued unabated, spearheaded by the Indian National Congress. It is interesting to note the attitude of the political leaders to military service under the British. During World War I, when the viceroy appealed to Indians to come forward and enlist, his call was supported by the political leaders of the

day, including Gandhi and Tilak. Following the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 and the Quit India movement in 1942, many Indian officers with nationalistic feelings had misgivings about military service under British rule. Nonetheless, they continued to serve for many reasons. The primary role of the Indian Army was to defend India, and service in the army could not be termed as anti-national. Secondly, the political leaders who were then heading the freedom struggle had decided to support Britain during the War, after being assured that India would be given dominion status once it was over. Many soldiers were affected by the freedom struggle, and contemplated leaving the service to join it. However, they were invariably dissuaded by the far-sighted political leaders of the day.

In a speech at Poona in 1916, Bal Gangadhar Tilak said: “If you want Home Rule be prepared to defend your home. Had it not been for my age, I would have been the first to volunteer. You cannot reasonably say that the ruling will be done by you and the fighting for you – by Europeans or Japanese, in the matter of Home Defence. Show ... that you are willing to take advantage of the opportunity offered to you by the Viceroy to enlist in an Indian Citizen’s Army. When you do that, your claim for having the commissioned ranks opened to you will acquire double weight.”⁶

Second Lieutenant (later Major General) AA Rudra passed out from the Temporary School for Indian Cadets, also known as the Daly Cadet College, Indore on 1 December 1919, along with 38 others officers, including KM Cariappa, who was to become the first Indian commander-in-chief. Before joining the Daly Cadet College in 1918, Rudra had fought at Ypres and Somme in World War I as a member of the Universities and Public Schools Brigade. En route to join his battalion - the 28th Punjabis, then stationed near Jerusalem in Palestine – Rudra spent a month’s leave with his father, Prof. S.K. Rudra, who was then Principal of St. Stephen’s College, Delhi. At that time Mahatma Gandhi was staying as a house guest. In fact, after returning from South Africa, Gandhi stayed in Prof. Rudra’s house for nine years, from 1915 to 1923, before moving to the Bhangi Colony. During his leave, while

bicycling through Chandni Chowk, the young Rudra was horrified when he saw British troops using force to suppress the violent protests after the Jallianwala Bagh incident. He decided to resign his commission and sought Gandhi's advice.

That evening, Rudra sought out the Mahatma, who shared his father's study. Unburdening his doubts and dismays, Rudra asked Gandhi for his advice – whether he should or should not hold a commission in the British-Indian Army. Without giving a direct answer, Gandhi told Rudra that he was a grown up, mature man, not a child; he had fought for three years in the Great War and faced dangers and difficulties. It was for him to make up his own mind and act accordingly. Rudra replied that he had been away from India for six years and was unaware of the political changes that had taken place during his absence. He wanted to know what would happen if there was a fight for independence, and he found himself on the wrong side. Gandhi said: “How can we ever hope to rid ourselves of the British by force of arms? We are a poor, uneducated, unarmed people – we can never fight the British. But do not despair. I know my Englishman. He will deal with us honourably. When the time is ripe and if our cause is a righteous one and if our country is ready for it, he will give us our freedom on a platter. And then, when we are a free country, we shall have to have an army.” Indirect as it was, Rudra took it as a green light to remain in the army. ⁷

In September 1926, after passing out from Sandhurst, Second Lieutenant (later Lieutenant General) SPP Thorat and a few of his colleagues were returning from UK on the P & O liner *Kaiser-i-Hind*. On the same ship were two well known Indians - Lala Lajpat Rai and Mohammed Ali Jinnah. As Thorat recalls in his memoirs, both of them took a paternal interest in the newly commissioned Indian officers. Lajpat Rai asked Thorat to correct the proofs of his latest book *Unhappy India*. One day Thorat asked him, “Sir, do you think that we have done wrong in joining the Indian Army on the strength of which the British are ruling us?” Lalaji thought for a while and then replied, “No, I don't think so at all. How long will the British continue to

rule us? One day, India shall become a free country, and then we will need trained men like you. So work hard and qualify yourself for that moment.”⁸

In 1928, Captain (later General) K S Thimayya's battalion, 4/19 Hyderabad, moved from Baghdad to Allahabad. Thimayya spent a few days in Bombay, enroute, where he met Sarojini Naidu, who introduced him to Jinnah. This was Thimayya's first contact with nationalist leaders, and he found the experience confusing. As an Indian, he sympathised with their cause. But as a soldier, he had sworn an oath of allegiance to the British sovereign. He was not sure if he could reconcile his position, with respect to his country, and his profession. At Allahabad, he came into close contact with the Nehrus, and was a frequent guest at Anand Bhawan, where he came to know Nehru's sisters, Vijay Lakshmi Pandit and Krishna (Betty) Hutheesingh. He also met Dr. Kailash Nath Katju and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru. After the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930, there was a general upsurge of nationalist feeling among the people. Thimayya was deeply impressed by the winds of nationalism then blowing through the country, and the sacrifices being made by the people. On one occasion, he almost got into trouble, for throwing his peak cap in a bonfire of British goods, at the behest of Krishna Hutheesingh. One day, he and some other Indian officers, met Moti Lal Nehru and told him that they wanted to resign their commissions. The elder Nehru told them not to do so. “There are enough of us in the Congress, and we need more people in the army”, he said, advising them to stick it out. He felt that the Indianisation of the army had been achieved after lot of effort and should not be stopped. He added: “We're going to win independence. Perhaps not this year or the next, but sooner or later the British will be driven out. When that happens, India will stand alone. We will have no one to protect us but ourselves. It is then that our survival will depend on men like you.”⁹

During the Quit India Movement in 1942, Mahatma Gandhi was interned at the Aga Khan Palace at Poona, under the direct care of Colonel MG Bhandari, of the Army Medical Corps, the father-in-law of Captain (later Lieutenant General) P.S. Bhagat, who had recently won the Victoria Cross. Accompanied

by his colleague Arjan Singh, Prem Bhagat went to meet the great man, and asked him how they could help in the freedom movement. Gandhiji gave them almost the same answer that he had given Second Lieutenant Rudra more than 20 years earlier. He advised Bhagat and his friends to continue in their chosen profession. He said that once the country became free, it would require the services of dedicated professional soldiers.¹⁰

Along with Mahatma Gandhi, almost all the prominent Congress leaders were imprisoned during the Quit India Movement in 1942. This caused resentment in the great majority of Indian soldiers and officers, many of them being imbued with nationalistic feelings for the first time. One such officer was Second Lieutenant Dadachanji, who was posted in the training battalion of the 15th Punjabis, located in Ambala. He was a Parsee, who had been studying in England when war broke out, and volunteered for enlistment. After the political disturbances in the wake of the Cripps Mission, the battalion was put on alert and ordered to have one company on permanent standby for internal security duties. When Dadachanji was detailed to command a flying column, he refused. He was promptly put under arrest by his company commander for treason, and subsequently marched up before the commanding officer, Major AA Rudra. When asked the reasons for his refusal to do duty, Dadachanji stated firmly and indignantly that he had joined the army voluntarily to fight Germans, not to shoot down his own countrymen; he was not going to take part in any internal security duty that might involve shooting Indians. Rudra was impressed by his moral courage; he ruled out the charge of treason and released Dadachanji from arrest. The case was forwarded to the brigade commander, who also took a liberal view of the case. By the time the matter reached District Headquarters at Lahore, large scale violence had erupted in the wake of the Quit India movement. The authorities decided to hush up the matter and advised him to resign. Dadachanji agreed, albeit reluctantly.¹¹

Among the political leaders of that period, the only one who advocated violence as a means of achieving freedom was Subhas Chandra Bose. However, according to Commodore BK Dang, his views were similar to those

of others as far as military service under the British was concerned. Dang had done his training as a marine engineer on the training ship *Dufferin* before the outbreak of World War II. When the war started he volunteered and was accepted in the Royal Indian Navy. He was sent to Calcutta for an engineering course and was staying with a friend who was a socialist. When they came to know that Subhas Bose was living nearby under house arrest, Dang and his colleagues expressed a desire to meet him. Bose came to the house just behind the one where they were staying to meet Dang and his friends. One of them was CGK Reddy, who later joined the *Deccan Herald*, becoming a close associate of George Fernandes and subsequently a member of the Rajya Sabha. When Dang and his friends told Bose that they wanted to join the freedom movement, he advised them to stick on in the navy and get trained so that when the British left they could take over from the British.

Although the struggle for freedom had been going on for almost half a century, the Indian armed forces remained virtually untouched until the outbreak of World War II, when a large number of Indians were granted emergency commissions. Though Indians had been given commissions earlier, their number was small. Moreover, most of them came from feudal or military families, which were largely unaffected by political events. On the other hand, the majority of emergency commissioned officers came from rural or urban middle class backgrounds, which were the most active constituents of the freedom movement. Due to their upbringing, lack of training and political leanings, the emergency commissioned officers were not treated as equals by British officers. This discriminatory attitude was largely responsible for the growth of disaffection and nationalistic fervour among Indian officers during World War II. Another reason that caused frustration among Indian officers was the perceived delay in the process of Indianisation, which seemed to be progressing at a very slow pace, mainly due to opposition by British officers.

It may appear strange, but many people connected with the freedom movement did not hesitate to send their sons to serve in the army. One such person was Dr Christopher Barretto, a leading dental surgeon of Nagpur,

who was frequently summoned to Wardha to treat Mahatma Gandhi. His son, Terence Barretto, joined the army and was commissioned in the Indian Signal Corps in 1940, retiring as a brigadier in 1965. Terence recalls that Mahatma Gandhi often referred patients to his father, requesting him not to charge them for his services, as they were “members of his growing family of national beggars.” Among the “national beggars” treated by Dr Barretto were Mahadev Desai, the Mahatma’s secretary, and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the Frontier Gandhi. Terence Barretto was himself a die-hard nationalist, who was constantly in trouble for his anti-British views, being once put on ‘adverse report’ by his commanding officer in Burma. He had frequent tiffs with British officers on minor issues such as playing Indian music or eating Indian food in the mess. He recalls that Indian officers keenly followed the activities of leaders of the freedom movement and discussed among themselves the future of the country. He still has in his possession the copy of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of 26 January 1947, which he purchased in Chittagong, containing a full page (in colour) of the Congress flag, with the Indian Independence Pledge in bold print. On the reverse of the page is “Sixty Years of Congress” by Dr. Pattabhi Sitaramayya. Barretto and his colleagues hung the flag in their room behind a curtain.

The most well known nationalist soldier was Lieutenant General Thakur Nathu Singh, a Sandhurst trained King’s commissioned Indian officer who had been christened ‘Fauji Gandhi’ by his colleagues. Even as a young officer, Nathu Singh openly expressed his anti- British feelings, for which he was often in trouble. When he was a major he was asked to suppress an agitation during the Quit India movement in 1942. Nathu Singh objected, saying that it was not fair to ask him to shoot at his own countrymen, who were only asking for their freedom. He requested the commanding officer to give the job to some other officer, but this was refused, and he was told that if he disobeyed orders he would be court martialled. Nathu Singh refused to carry out the orders, and the matter was reported to the District Commander, Major General Bruce Scott. When he was marched up to General Scott, Nathu Singh defended his

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action, as a “conscientious objector”, quoting the example of similar cases in Ireland. To his good luck, Scott turned out to be an Irishman. He appreciated the stand taken by Nathu Singh, and let him off.

Nathu Singh was of the view that the slow process of Indianisation and the discriminatory treatment of Indian officers were largely responsible for the birth of the Indian National Army (INA). He had grave doubts whether the British were serious about Indianisation, or it was merely “window dressing,” to impress the public and the outside World. Despite the fact that two and a half million Indians had fought in two wars, they had not been able to produce a single general. Important appointments dealing with operations were denied to them, and just a handful were given command of units. Drawing a parallel with the Soviet Union, which took shape at about the same time as Indianisation began in India, the disparities were obvious. However, his most scathing comments were reserved for the unfair treatment meted out to Indians, which he covered at length in a strongly worded letter to the Commander-in-Chief, General Auchinleck, on 17 December 1945, soon after the commencement of the INA trials in the Red Fort in Delhi. Nathu Singh, who was then a lieutenant colonel, wrote:

The formation of the INA was not alone the work of its leaders like Bose, or of the Jap Opportunist. The creation and growth of the INA was a direct result of the continuous unjust treatment of Indian officers in the Army. It is the natural heritage of years of dissatisfaction, disappointment and disgust of various elements in the Indian Army. The present members of the INA are to be blamed for their conduct, but equally to blame is the Imperialist Anti-Indian British element in the army who by their talk and action daily estranged the otherwise loyal mind of the Indian, and last but not the least to blame are the British reverses in the Far East, which left the Indian soldier to their fate¹²

The growth of nationalism in the armed forces was inevitable, given the sentiments of the general public. To their credit, senior British officers

recognised it as a natural consequence of the mood sweeping the country, which touched all sections of society. In a communication to army commanders after the first INA trials, General Auchinleck wrote: "In this connection, it should be remembered, I think, that every Indian worthy of the name is today a "Nationalist", though this does not mean that he is necessarily "anti British". All the same, where India and her independence is concerned there are no pro-British Indians. Every Indian commissioned officer is a Nationalist and rightfully so, provided he hopes to attain independence for India by constitutional means."¹³

The discontent among Indian officers was noticeable not only in the combat arms, but also in the supporting arms and services. In April 1946, Major General CHH Vulliamy, the signal officer-in-chief addressed a letter to all commanding officers. He wrote: "Very few ICOs have applied for regular commission. I believe that the main reason for this poor response is that a large majority of the ICOs in the Corps are discontented because they feel that they have been given a raw deal during the war and that this feeling has been engendered mainly due to two causes: discrimination shown by certain COs against ICOs and unsympathetic attitude towards ICOs." In another letter addressed to the chief signal officers of commands, General Vulliamy wrote: "It appears to me that there is a certain amount of hesitation lower down the chain of command in implementing freely and fully the policy of Indianisation. This lack of trust in ICOs must stop. Either an ICO is fit to be an officer or he is not."¹⁴

The military hierarchy was aware of the discontent and alienation of Indian officers. These issues, coupled with the growing aspirations for independence, became a source of concern. They tried to take remedial measures, but it was too late. By the time World War II ended, Indian officers had become true nationalists. This was one of the most important factors in the British decision to grant complete independence to India, and also to advance the date from June 1948 to August 1947.

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Notes

This chapter is largely based on Sir Penderel Moon's *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (London, Duckworth, 1989); F.W Perry's *The Commonwealth Armies – Manpower and Reorganization in Two World Wars* (Manchester, 1988); and Bisheshwar Prasad's *Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War 1939-45 – India and the War* (New Delhi, 1966). Specific references are given below:

1. Lt. Gen S.L. Menezes, *Fidelity and Honour* (New Delhi, 1993), p. 10, quoting M. Moir, *A General Guide to the India Office Records* (London, 1988), p. 3.
2. *Ibid.*, 187.
3. Bisheshwar Prasad, (ed.), *Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War 1939-45 – India and the War* (New Delhi, 1966), p.35.
4. F.W Perry, *The Commonwealth Armies – Manpower and Reorganization in Two World Wars* (Manchester, 1988), pp. 87-117.
5. Sir Penderel Moon, *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (London, Duckworth, 1989), pp. 1093-1094.
6. Stephen C. Cohen, *The Indian Army* (Delhi, 1990), p. 92, quoting Bal Gangadhar Tilak – *His Writings and Speeches*, p.365.
7. Maj Gen D.K. Palit, *Major General A.A Rudra – His Service in Three Armies and Two World wars* (New Delhi, 1997) p. 71-72.
8. Lt Gen S.P.P. Thorat, *From Reveille to Retreat* (New Delhi, 1986), p. 8.
9. Humphrey Evans, *Thimayya of India* (Dehradun, 1988), p.123.
10. Lt Gen. Mathew Thomas and Jasjit Mansingh, *Lt. Gen. PS Bhagat, VC* (New Delhi, 1994), p.102.
11. Palit, note 7, pp. 252-254.
12. Maj. Gen. V.K. Singh, *Leadership in the Indian Army – Biographies of Twelve Soldiers* (New Delhi, 2005), p.64.
13. Maj. Gen. Ian Cardozo (ed.), *The Indian Army - A Brief History* (New Delhi, 2005), p. 54.
14. Maj. Gen. VK Singh, *History of the Corps of Signals, Volume II* (New Delhi, 2006), p.296.

11

The Soldier's Contribution To Indian Independence

India was pitched into World War II on 3 September 1939 by a proclamation by the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, who consulted neither the Central Legislature nor the major political parties. Mahatma Gandhi openly expressed his sympathy for Britain, but the Congress made its support conditional to a promise that India would be granted dominion status, if not complete independence, after the war ended. Finding such an assurance not forthcoming, the Congress decided to resign from the ministries in all provinces. The Muslims were divided on the issue; while the Muslim League warned the British government that they would support them only if they were given justice and fair play, the Muslim premiers of Bengal, Punjab and Sind pledged the unconditional support of their provinces. Soon afterwards, Jinnah made the demand for a separate state for the Muslims – Pakistan. This was opposed not only by the Congress but by several prominent Muslims, such as Fazl-ul-Huq and Sir Sikander Hayat Khan. Unfortunately, the viceroy did not give Jinnah's demand serious thought, choosing to ignore the demand and leave it for some one else to deal with, after the war. In a letter to Lord Zetland, the secretary of state for India, he wrote, "I am not too keen to start talking about a period after which British rule will have ceased in India. I suspect that the day is very remote and I feel the least we say about it in all probability the better". Later, the well known historian S Gopal commented on this passage: "There could be no more revealing gloss

on all the statements made by British authorities over the years on their determination to leave India.”¹

Linlithgow was not the only British statesman who regarded grant of independence to India as premature; if anything, Churchill was an even greater imperialist. After the fall of France in 1940 and of Singapore and Burma in 1941, British fortunes were at a low ebb. With the Japanese invasion of India becoming a real possibility, it became important for Britain to garner support from the Indian public. In January 1942, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, a prominent liberal leader, telegraphed the British prime minister, advising him to treat India on par with other units of the Commonwealth. General Chiang Kai-Shek, worried that China would be cut off from western aid if India fell, visited India in February to rally Indian opinion against the Japanese, at the end of which he reported to Roosevelt and Churchill that unless the Indian political problem was immediately solved, Japanese attack on India would be “virtually unopposed.” A few weeks before the “Lend Lease” Bill was signed, Roosevelt sent Averell Harriman to London with the message: “Get out of India, or you may not get what you need now.” Shortly afterwards, Roosevelt wrote to Churchill that American public opinion just could not understand why India could not be granted independence immediately.²

Churchill decided to send Sir Stafford Cripps to India with a draft declaration of policy that was designed to convince the Indian people of Britain’s sincere resolve to grant them independence as soon as the war was over. During the war, the present set-up would continue, with Britain retaining control for the direction of the war. The declaration was more than what had been offered earlier, and both the Congress and the Muslim League were inclined to accept it. However, Mahatma Gandhi opposed it, since it provided for the provinces and the rulers of princely states, as distinct from the people of these states, the authority to refuse accession, which could result in vivisection of the country. During discussions, it emerged that the proposed Executive Council that was to consist entirely of Indians, except for the viceroy and the commander-in-chief, would have very little say in defence

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matters. As a result, the declaration was rejected by both the Congress and the Muslim League. Commenting on the episode, Penderel Moon writes:

The mission had failed, as Linlithgow, Churchill and Amery had expected and may well have hoped. Churchill indeed did not attempt to conceal his pleasure at the outcome. In a consoling telegram to Cripps he said that the effect throughout Britain and the United States had been 'wholly beneficial'. As a public relations exercise designed to appease American and left-wing British opinion, it was certainly a success. A serious attempt to meet Indian political aspirations had been made, and this was really no less important than that it should succeed – indeed its success should be fraught with positive disadvantages. Congress leaders as members of the executive Council were likely to be more of an embarrassment than a help in the prosecution of the war, and endless wranglings between them and the League members were more probable than a gradual drawing together in the execution of a common task.³

After the failure of the Cripps Mission, the British made no serious attempt to end the deadlock until the war ended. The intervening years saw many political changes, one of the notable ones being the "Quit India" resolution of 1942, after which almost all Congress leaders were imprisoned and Jinnah gradually emerged as the undisputed leader of the Muslims. There was no apparent change in the British attitude to Indian independence, Linlithgow continuing to hold the view that British rule in India would continue for a long time. "For many years to come", he told LCMS Amery, the secretary of state for India, "our position in India will be the dominating position." In the same vein he told William Phillips, an emissary of President Roosevelt, "There could be no question of our handing over here for very many years."⁴

In October 1943 Linlithgow was replaced as Viceroy by Field Marshal Wavell, the post of commander-in-chief in India being taken by General Sir Claude Auchinleck, who returned to his old job from the Middle East.

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Unlike his predecessor, Wavell did not wish to wait for the war to end before finding a solution to the Indian problem. Even before he took up his new appointment, he submitted to London a memorandum recommending the formation of a coalition government in India drawn from all political parties. His proposal was shot down by the archtype imperialist, Prime Minister Winston Churchill. After attending a meeting in which his proposal was discussed, Wavell was convinced that the Cabinet was “not honest in its expressed desire to make progress in India.” Not surprisingly, Wavell waited for a year before making any fresh political move in India. During this period, his proposals for appointment of Indians in important positions or upgrading their status were vetoed by London. In September 1944, he sent to the secretary of state a proposal for a transitional government working within the existing constitution but representative of all political parties. Wavell offered to come to London personally to explain his proposals.

After procrastinating for six months, the government asked Wavell to come to London, only after a veiled threat to resign if there was any further delay. The next two months were spent in futile discussions with various members of the Cabinet. Churchill’s obduracy prevented any worthwhile result until the end of the war in Europe, after which the Coalition was dissolved and a caretaker Conservative government took office. Churchill suddenly dropped his objections; he subsequently revealed that he had been assured that the move was bound to fail. After he returned to India, Wavell invited Gandhi, Jinnah and 20 other political leaders for a conference at Simla, where he placed his proposals before them. Churchill had been right; the conference failed, thanks to Jinnah’s intransigence. However, Gandhi, Azad and several others were impressed by Wavell’s sincerity. They felt that he had opened new possibilities of Indo British friendship. ⁵

The World War II came to an end with the capitulation of Japan after the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. This coincided with the victory of the Labour Party in the general elections in Britain. With Churchill’s removal from the scene, the Indian problem began

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to receive serious attention. Wavell's suggestions to hold elections for the central and provincial assemblies lift the ban on Congress organisations and release political prisoners were approved and he was asked to come to London for consultations. Sir Penderel Moon gives an interesting hypothesis as to the reasons for the change in Britain's outlook after the war, which explains the central role of the Indian army in bringing about the end of British rule in India. He writes:

Even before the war, British rule over India had become an anachronism, and two of the reasons that had then deterred the British from relaxing their grip had now, as result of the war, lost all validity. One of these was the fear that an independent Indian Government might repudiate all India's foreign debt, most of which was held in England; but by the end of the war this had all been liquidated and Great Britain had become the debtor, owing India over 1,000 million pounds. The second and less selfish reason was that in the pre-war years there were not nearly enough trained Indian military officers to take over the Indian army and provide for India's defence; but now there were over 15,000 trained Indian officers, and though only two or three had reached the rank of brigadier there was a sufficient number of them capable of filling the higher posts except in the technical arms, and plenty of regimental officers. ⁶

Towards the end of 1945, Wavell was confronted with a new problem - the trials of three officers of the Indian National Army in the Red Fort at Delhi. During the war people in India and the political parties had virtually ignored the Indian National Army, which had been raised from captured Indian prisoners of war with the help of Japanese. After the fall of Rangoon, Subhas Chandra Bose fled to Bangkok – he died in an air crash shortly afterwards – leaving behind the bulk of the officers and men of the Indian National Army who became prisoners. It was decided to segregate them into three groups – white, grey and black – depending on the extent of their involvement.

The majority, who fell in the first two categories, were either reinstated or discharged, but those who were accused of serious atrocities were to be tried by court martial. The initial trials were held in Simla and did not attract much notice. About 20 such men were found guilty and executed at Attock before it was decided to shift the trials to Delhi.⁷

The decision to carry out the trials in the Red Fort at Delhi was unwise, as Auchinleck was to lament on several occasions. It gave the Congress a heaven-sent opportunity to arouse popular feeling against the British. The Muslim League also expressed their support for the prisoners, and the viceroy and commander-in-chief were in a dilemma. The three officers were found guilty of waging war against the king, and sentenced to be cashiered and transported for life. The sentences caused great resentment and Auchinleck was forced commute the sentences of transportation. This had a serious impact, since it divided the Indian Army, where there were many who agreed with the decision while others felt that it amounted to condoning treason, considered the most heinous of military crimes. For the first time in its long history, there were fissures in the Indian Army, which were to have serious consequences in the coming months.

The year 1946 opened with serious cases of disaffection in all three armed services, which have been described in earlier chapters. In the last week of March the Cabinet Mission, comprising Sir Stafford Cripps, the president of the Board of Trade; Mr. A.V. Alexander, first lord of the Admiralty; and Lord Pethick Lawrence, the secretary of state, arrived in Delhi, with the task of reaching an agreement with the principal political parties on two issues: one, the method of framing a constitution for a self-governing, independent India and two, the setting up of a new Executive Council of Interim Government that would hold office while the constitution was being drafted. The viceroy was fully involved in the deliberation of the Cabinet Mission, but the problem of the disaffection in the armed services caused him not a little anxiety. In a dispatch addressed to King George VI on 22 March 1946, he wrote:

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The last three months have been anxious and depressing. They have been marked by continuous and unbridled abuse of the Government, of the British, of officials and police, in political speeches, in practically the whole of the Press, and in the Assembly; by serious rioting in Bombay; by a mutiny in the RIN, much indiscipline in the RIAF; some unrest in the Army; by an unprecedented drought and famine conditions over many parts of India; by threatened strikes on the Railways, and in the Posts and Telegraphs; by a general sense of insecurity and lawlessness.

The most disturbing feature of all is that unrest is beginning to appear in some units of the Indian Army; so far almost entirely in the technical arms. Auchinleck thinks that the great mass of the Indian Army is still sound, and I believe that this is so. It may not take long, however, to shake their steadiness if the Congress and Muslim League determine to use the whole power of propaganda at their command to do so. ⁸

On 27 March 1946, Sir J.A. Thorne, the home member of the Viceroy's Council, was asked to prepare a brief appreciation of what would happen if the Cabinet Mission did not achieve a settlement. One of the important points covered was the staunchness of the Indian Services if called upon to quell civil disturbances. According to Thorne's appreciation, which he submitted on 5 April, the loyalty of the Services could no longer be taken for granted. In the 1942 disturbances, the Services were nearly 100 percent staunch, but this would not be so on a future occasion. If faced with the prospect of firing on mobs, not all units could be relied upon. As regards the behaviour that could be expected of troops generally under these circumstances, there would be a lot of disaffection, and downright mutiny, especially in the RIAF, RIN and Signals units. Thorne suggested that an appreciation on these aspects be prepared by the War Department. ⁹

The commander-in-chief directed the director of military intelligence, Brigadier BPT O'Brien, to assess the present state morale and degree of reliability of the three Indian fighting services, with special reference to the

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Indian commissioned officers, from the point of view of their capacity to under three conditions – in aid of civil power in widespread communal or ant-present-Government disturbances; in operations on the Frontier; and as garrisons over seas. The director of military intelligence submitted the note to the commander-in-chief on 25 April, who expressed his general agreement with its contents. Extracts from the Note are given below: ¹⁰

.....We consider that the Indian Services could not remain in being in the face of communal trouble started by, or turned into, a Jihad; neither can we suggest any action which might increase the likelihood of them starting firm under these circumstances.

We consider that the very great bulk of Indian Armoured Corps, Gunners, Sappers and Infantry, could be relied on to act in communal trouble not amounting to a Jihad but would advise against bringing other services in the Army, the R.I.N. or the R.I.A.F. into direct contact with rioters.

...Our views on the reliability of the Indian Services in widespread Congress inspired trouble are

- (a) The Indian Armoured Corps, Gunners, Sappers and Infantry can in the main be depended on provided that their I.C.Os, particularly the senior ones, remain loyal and any waverers among them are dealt with firmly and immediately...
- (b) The Indian Signal Corps cannot at present be considered reliable....
- (c) The Ancillary Services of the Army as a whole should not be relied on to act against rioters...
- (d)The Royal Indian Navy cannot at present be regarded as reliable....
- (e)The Royal Indian Air Force must be regarded as doubtful...

...the key to the reliability of the Services, particularly the Army, is the attitude of the I.C.O. ...the morale of the I.C.O. can be greatly improved by the example and attitude of British officers...

Auchinleck forwarded Brigadier O'Brien's Note to the viceroy and the

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Cabinet Mission, giving copies to army commanders as well as the Chiefs of the Royal Indian Navy and the Royal Indian Air Force. As can be imagined, it caused considerable dismay and alarm in all quarters. Meanwhile, the Cabinet Mission requested the viceroy for an appreciation of the situation that was likely to arise if their proposals fail and for a general policy on India in that event. In a Top Secret Memorandum dated 30 May 1946, Wavell made some interesting observations. The Congress, he felt, was determined to grasp all the power they can as quickly as possible. "It is as if a starving prisoner was suddenly offered unlimited quantities of food...his instinct is to seize it all at once ... also to eat as much and as quickly as possible, an action which is bound to have ill effects on his health'. As for Mahatma Gandhi, he was 'a pure political opportunist, and an extremely skilful one, whose guiding principle is to get rid of the hated British influence out of India as soon as possible.'" Wavell warned that if the Congress and Muslim League failed to come to terms, serious communal riots may break out, with very little warning, especially in the Punjab and the 'Mutiny Provinces' of UP and Bihar. Prompt action would be required to deal with the trouble, with very little time for consultations with London. He suggested that their actions should be based on certain definite principles, the first being to give India self-government as quickly as possible without disorder and chaos breaking out. It was important that Britain should avoid a situation in which she had to withdraw from India under circumstance of ignominy after wide spread riots and attacks on Europeans, or adopt a course that could be treated as a policy of "scuttle" or gave the appearance of weakness. While deciding the short term policy, the long-term strategic interests of Britain should be safeguarded. In the event of serious trouble, there was a military plan, which provided for holding on to the principal ports – Calcutta, Madras, Bombay, Karachi – and to Delhi. Subsequently, British troops would be transferred from Southern India to the North. Stressing the need to avoid at all cost being embroiled with both Hindus and Muslims, he suggested a "worst case" solution – to hand over the Hindu Provinces to the Congress and withdraw

to the Muslim Provinces, the Northwest and Northeast. ¹¹

Three days later, the Cabinet Mission and the viceroy sent a 'Most Immediate' telegram to the Prime Minister, stressing the urgent need for the British Government to announce a clear policy in the event of the negotiations between the Cabinet Mission and the political parties breaking down. They expected the crisis to be reached any time between 5 and 15 June, and the necessity for urgent decision on the line of action that the viceroy was to adopt. The first point to be decided was whether they should attempt to repress a mass movement sponsored by the Congress and maintain the existing form of government. This was possible only if the Indian army remained loyal, which was doubtful. It would also cause much bloodshed and achieve nothing, unless it was intended to stay on in India for another 10 to 20 years. At the other extreme was the decision to withdraw from the whole of India as soon as the Congress gave a call for a mass uprising. This would have an adverse impact on British prestige throughout the Commonwealth. After considering several options, the Cabinet Mission opined that if negotiations did in fact break down and they were faced with serious internal disorders, the situation would have to be met by adopting one of five courses. These were (1) complete withdrawal from India as soon as possible; (2) withdrawal by a certain date; (3) an appeal to the United Nations Organisation; (4) maintaining overall control throughout India; and (5) giving independence to Southern and Central India (comprising the six provinces of Madras, Bombay, Central provinces and Berar, United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa, which were almost entirely Hindu), and maintaining the existing position in northwest and northeast India (Punjab, NWFP, Bengal and Assam). ¹²

The appreciations of the viceroy and the Cabinet mission reached London while the latter were still carrying out their negotiations in Delhi and Simla. They were considered by the Defence Committee of the Cabinet, which asked the Chiefs of Staff to examine the military implications of the five courses of action listed by the Cabinet Mission, keeping in mind the short-term policy and the long-term strategic interests listed by the Viceroy. The Report of the

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Chiefs of Staff, which was prepared without consulting General Headquarters India due to the short time available, figure in the Defence Committee Paper D.O. (46) 68 dated 12 June 1946, entitled "India – Military Implications of Proposed Courses of Action." It is a remarkable document, which reveals the difference in the mindset of "imperialists" in London and the "liberals" in Delhi. It also casts doubts on the intentions of the British Government, regarding granting independence to India.

Right at the beginning, the Chiefs of Staff – Alanbrooke, Cunningham and Tedder – spelt out the strategic requirements of Britain in India in any future war. It was emphasised that Britain should have recourse to India's industrial and manpower potential, and should be able to use her territory for operational and administrative bases, and air staging posts. It was, therefore, important that India should be secure from external aggression and internal disorder. For defence purposes, it was essential that she should remain a single unit. These were surprising assertions, considering that even at that moment, the Cabinet Mission was in Delhi, discussing with Indian leaders the form of self-governance that was to be introduced. It was also inconsistent with the Viceroy's stated views about giving India self-government as quickly as possible.

Before proceeding to examine the military implications of the courses proposed by the Cabinet Mission, the Chiefs of Staff eliminated the first three. The first and second courses that envisaged a complete withdrawal, with or without a time limit, were ruled out since they did not safeguard Britain's strategic interests. The third course of appealing to the United Nations had the disadvantage of freezing military action while the case was being debated, and was therefore unacceptable. That left only two courses viz. maintaining control throughout India and a withdrawal in phases, which they proceeded to examine. The most important factor in retaining hold over the whole country was the ability to maintain law and order, which depended largely on the loyalty of the Indian armed forces. The conclusions on this crucial aspect were in line with those of General Headquarters India: "....we

consider that the reliability of the Indian Army as a whole, including those in garrisons outside India is open to serious doubt. This applies even to Gurkha units....The Royal Indian Navy and the Royal Indian Air Force cannot be regarded as reliable.”

An important part of the report deals with the reinforcements required to deal with internal disorders, based on estimates given by the commander-in-chief, India. In case the Indian armed forces remained loyal, it was estimated that in addition to the existing British forces then in India, reinforcements of three brigade groups and five air transport squadrons would be required. In the event of Indian troops becoming disaffected, the existing British forces and reinforcements mentioned earlier would be employed to hold key areas. To restore the situation in case of widespread disorder, additional reinforcements `required would be between four and five British divisions, for which considerable administrative backing would also be needed. The Indian formations serving overseas would also have to be replaced by British formations. The requirement of reinforcements outside India was visualized as six brigades in Burma and Malaya; two brigades in Hong Kong and Japan; two battalions in the Dodecanese and three battalions in Iraq. The total British reinforcements thus came to five divisions for India; six brigades for Burma and Malaya and three battalions for Iraq.

The report examined the availability of reinforcements and implications of providing them. There was at that time one British division in the Middle East; two in Greece; one in Italy and one division and seven brigades in Germany. Apart from the fact that pulling them out from these theatres would have serious security implications, it would need at least four months to move all the troops, equipment and vehicles to India, and that too at the expense of merchant shipping and vessels then engaged in carrying personnel home under demobilisation and repatriation programmes. The implications of maintaining the existing units in India up to their present strength would make it necessary to stop release in the formations concerned. In the interest of equality of treatment, it may become necessary to suspend release

throughout the army and the other services. These would have a serious effect on morale as well as political repercussions. .

The last course proposed by the Cabinet Mission was granting independence to Hindustan viz. Southern and Central India comprising the six provinces of Madras, Bombay, Central Provinces and Beral, United Provinces, Bihar and Orissa; and withdrawing to Pakistan, viz. northwestern and northeastern India comprising Punjab, NWFP, Bengal and Assam. This had several political and military implications, the most important being the division of India, which would preclude the establishment of a central authority to deal with defence, and in turn prejudice the future security of India against external attack. The armed forces would have to be reorganised and while India would have a strong army immediately, it would take many years for Pakistan to form an effective army of her own, making her susceptible to raids from the tribes on the Northwest Frontier. There would be communal riots in the Punjab due to the large Hindu population in the area under British control in Pakistan. In Hindustan, the Muslims may be ill-treated. In the worst case, there may even be civil war, leading to British troops being involved in fighting with Hindustan and controlling communal strife in parts of Pakistan which have Hindu minorities. The report concluded that withdrawal into Pakistan would not safeguard British strategic interests, could lead to civil wars and in the event that Congress opposed it, even lead to war. Hence, this option was completely unacceptable on military grounds.

The report ended with the conclusions, which stated:

....A policy of remaining in India and firmly accepting responsibility for law and order would result, if the Indian Army remained loyal, in an acceptable military commitment and would safeguard our long term strategic interests....

If however, the Indian Armed Forces did not remain loyal... we would be faced with the necessity of providing five British divisions for India, with the consequent abandonment of commitments in other areas hitherto regarded as inescapable, serious effects on our import and export programmes and world-wide repercussions on the release scheme. The only alternative to this

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would be ignominious withdrawal from the hole of India.¹³

The report by the Chiefs of Staff is an important document that brings to light several important points connected with India's independence. It clearly brings out the fact that the British Government was seriously considering the option of creating Pakistan in June 1946, not because of the lack of agreement with the political parties – this was still being negotiated by the Cabinet Mission – but due to the threat of disaffection in the Indian armed forces. This option was ruled out only because it did not serve British strategic interests. The disparity in the outlook of British officials in London and Delhi is also clearly visible; for the former, Britain's long term strategic interest dictated continuation of British rule, while those closer to the scene of action, such as Wavell and Auchinleck, realised that it was time to go. Had the Indian armed forces remained loyal or there had been enough British divisions to keep them in check, the British would never have left India.

Early in September 1946, the viceroy forwarded to London a plan for phased withdrawal from India, which was a revised version of the Breakdown Plan of the Cabinet Mission. This had been rejected by the British government as it did not help British strategic interests. Wavell could see that the situation was steadily deteriorating, and unless a clear policy was announced, India could slide into anarchy. After consulting the governors and the commander-in-chief, he estimated that the British could hold on for not more than 18 months. The Secretary of State, Lord Pethick-Lawrence, did not agree with Wavell's appreciation. He felt that it was still possible to hold on to India, and proposed further European recruitment to augment British troops in India. By this time, serious communal riots had broken out in East Bengal and in the Punjab, resulting in sizeable casualties among Hindus as well as Muslims. A new Interim Government headed by Jawaharlal Nehru had been installed at Delhi, with Sardar Baldev Singh as the defence member. In a letter dated 12 September to Auchinleck, who had recently been appointed a field marshal, Nehru discussed the withdrawal of British forces from India;

pulling out Indian troops from the Netherlands East Indies and Iraq; and the future of the Indian Army. In a broadcast to the armed forces on 9 October, Baldev Singh announced the setting up of a committee to accelerate the pace of nationalisation. In view of these developments, Pethick-Lawrence's proposal to raise additional European troops for India appeared surreal.

Refusing to take no for an answer, Wavell sent a strongly worded note to the secretary of state on 23 October, in which he reiterated his demand for a firm declaration of the policy of the British government. His plan, he wrote, was based on two main assumptions: (1) the object was to transfer power to India without undue delay and with the minimum of disorder and bloodshed; to secure the interests of the minorities and to provide for the safety of the 90,000 Europeans in India; (2) the power of the British government in India was weakening daily, and could not be sustained beyond 18 months. Using exceptionally strong language, Wavell made it clear that as the man on the spot, it was his responsibility to advise the government of the action to be taken to achieve these objects. "If the H.M.G. consider that my advice shows lack of balance and judgment, or that I have lost my nerve, it is of course their duty to inform me of this and to replace me," he wrote. "But they take a very grave responsibility upon themselves if they simply neglect my advice." Wavell ended by emphasising that they "must have an emergency plan in readiness; and if it is agreed that we cannot hope to control events for longer than 18 months from now, we shall have to make up our minds and make a definite pronouncement at least in the first half of 1947. While I agree that we should not leave India till we have exhausted every possible means of securing a constitutional settlement, we can make no contribution to a settlement once we have lost all power of control."¹⁴

In December 1946, the British government invited Nehru, Baldev Singh, Jinnah and Liaqat Ali Khan to London for discussions, along with the viceroy. During his visit, Wavell again pressed for adoption of the Breakdown Plan, urging the government to announce that they would withdraw all control from India by March 1948. Some Cabinet ministers such as Bevin and

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Alexander, who were imperialists at heart, balked at the prospect of a stark announcement of the ending of the British Raj. Prime Minister Attlee also felt strongly that the British should not relinquish control until at least a constitutional settlement had been reached. Since the chances of reaching an amicable settlement appeared dismal, Attlee's views seemed illusory. After a series of meetings the India and Burma Committee decided to recommend that 31 March 1948 should be announced as the date by which the British would hand over power in India. Wavell pressed for a firm announcement in this regard by the British government. Attlee replied to Wavell on 21 December 1946, giving the impression that his proposal had been by and large accepted. Three days earlier, Attlee had offered Mountbatten the post of viceroy in replacement of Wavell.¹⁵

Mountbatten reached India on 22 March 1947. Before he left London, he had been told that India would be granted independence by June 1948, i.e. after 15 months; this was exactly what Wavell had been demanding for the last two years. On 23 May 1947, the British Cabinet approved, in principle, a draft Partition Plan, which was to be implemented in case of a failure to secure a final compromise. After consulting Indian political leaders, Mountbatten announced on 3 June 1947 that India would become independent on 15 August 1947. A few days later Mountbatten received the draft Indian Independence Bill, and was surprised to find that the British Government intended to retain the Andaman Islands, which were not be regarded as a part of British India. It transpired that Britain was planning to make the Andamans a British Settlement. The recommendation to retain the islands had come from the British Chiefs of Staff, due to their strategic location in the Bay of Bengal, covering the sea routes to the East. Mountbatten strongly opposed the plan, informing London that any attempt "to claim the Andaman Islands as colonies, to be treated in the same way as Aden, will cause an absolute flare-up throughout the length and breadth of India." In view of Mountbatten's strong opposition, the British government decided to drop the proposal.¹⁶

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The crucial role of the Indian armed forces, especially the Indian Army, in the British decision to quit India has been commented on by several writers and historians. Captain Shahid Hamid, who was the private secretary to General Auchinleck, made the following entry in his diary on 30 March 1946: "Today, the *Hindustan Times* commented editorially on the Auk's appeal to the Indian Army. "There is no doubt whatever that if the transfer of power is not quickly brought about, the foreign rulers of India cannot count upon the loyalty of the Indian Army'..."¹⁷

The well known historian, Dr. Tara Chand, has written: "The most controversial measure of the Viceroy was the decision to advance the date of transfer of power from June 1948 to August 15, 1947. On this issue Mountbatten recorded his reasons in his conclusions appended to the Report on the Last Viceroyalty submitted to His Majesty's Government in September 1948. His defence for expediting the transference of power to the Indians was on these lines... "Secondly, the ultimate sanction of law and order, namely, the Army, presented difficulties for use as an instrument of government for maintenance of peace..."¹⁸

Mangat Rai, a colleague of Penderel Moon in the Indian Civil Service before Independence, wrote an appreciation of the latter's book *The British Conquest and Dominion of India*. Commenting on the role of the Indian Army he writes:

How far were the competence and size of the Indian army factors in persuading the British to contemplate withdrawal from India, and in the final decision? In general, Moon has consistent praise both for the sepoy regiments of the Company and for the Indian army's contribution in two world wars. He notes that at the end of the Second World War, the army comprised two and a half million, in place of the 190,000 at the start. The army's record was brilliant marred only by the defection of comparatively small numbers to the Japanese promoted INA. With an army of Indians of this calibre and size, would it have been practical to continue to govern India under British control? ¹⁹

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Charles Raikes, a British Civil servant of the mutiny days, had bluntly asserted that the British “should legislate and govern India as the superior race,” adding with some prescience, “whenever that superiority ceases, our right to remain in India terminates also.” This was in line with the view held by most Britons, who felt that British rule was a blessing for India. By the time World War II ended, the USA had assumed the mantle of the leader of the developed world, and her democratic principles of equality began to be embraced by other nations in the West. From the mutiny onwards, Indians had steadily acquired knowledge and skills that they had previously lacked, closing the gap between them and the British. According to Sir Penderel Moon, “One noteworthy, but not often mentioned, example of change was the ending of the superiority of British to Indian troops, which had been a factor in the Company’s original conquest of India. By 1943 Indian Divisions, in the opinion of Field Marshal Sir William Slim, were among the best in the world and divisional commanders on the Burma front called for Indian rather than British battalions. Thus Charles Raikes, if he had still been alive, would probably have felt obliged to admit that on his own premises the time had come for British withdrawal.”²⁰

It is interesting to reflect on what may have been the course of history if the Indian soldier had not been affected by nationalistic feelings and continued to serve loyally as he had during and before World War II. Though the freedom movement had developed considerable momentum by the time the war ended, the assumption that it would have achieved independence on its own would be erroneous. With the vast resources at their disposal, it would not have been difficult for the British authorities in India to muzzle the movement, as they had done in 1930 and 1942. The only reason for them not being able to resort to such measures after 1945 was the uncertain dependability of the army. Had the Indian soldier remained staunch, or adequate British forces been available, it is most unlikely that freedom would have come in 1947. If nothing else, it would have been delayed by 10-15 years. If this had happened, perhaps India would not have been partitioned, the

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Kashmir problem would not have existed, and the Indo-Pak Wars of 1948, 1965 and 1972 would not have been fought. Who knows, with its large size, population and a long spell of peace unfettered by the threat of war, India would have been a world power, equalling or even surpassing China by the turn of the century.

Notes

This chapter is largely based on Sir Penderel Moon's *The British Conquest and Dominion of India*, (London, Duckworth, 1989); and Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon's *The Transfer of Power 1942-47* (London, 1982). Specific references are given below:

1. Sir Penderel Moon, *The British Conquest and Dominion of India* (London, Duckworth, 1989), P. 1092, quoting S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru (1975-79)*, vol. 1, p. 263.
2. Lt. Gen S.L. Menezes, *Fidelity and Honour* (New Delhi, 1993), p. 345.
3. Moon, note 1, p. 1109.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 1122.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 1136-1138.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 1140.
7. Maj Gen D.K. Palit, *Major General A.A Rudra – His Service in Three Armies and Two World wars* (New Delhi, 1997), p. 277.
8. Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon, (ed.) *The Transfer of Power 1942-47* (12 vols, London) vol. vi, pp. 1233-1237.
9. *Ibid.*, vol. vii, p.150.
10. *Ibid.*, vol. vii, pp. 406-407.
11. *Ibid.*, vol. vii, pp. 731-737.
12. *Ibid.*, vol. vii, pp. 787-795.
13. *Ibid.*, vol. vii, pp. 889-900.
14. *Ibid.*, vol. viii, pp.794-799.
15. Moon, note 1, pp. 1164-1165.

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16. Mansergh and Moon, note 8, vol. xi, 306.
17. Major General Shahid Hamid, *Disastrous Twilight* (London, 1986), p.47.
18. Dr Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*.
19. Moon, note 1, pp. 1195.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 1187.

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