

THE IMPERIAL RESERVE

The Indian Infantry on the Western Front, 1914-15

by

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TO WENDY AND DAVID
MY CHILDREN

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INTRODUCTION

Military history is both the father and bastard child of history. The earliest known historians wrote primarily of battles and wars, yet today military history and historians have been relegated to the unswept corners of the American historical profession. Part of this is due to the modern western scholar's abhorance of war, particularly in America following the trauma of Vietnam, but part is also due to the all too often failure of military historians to make use of the other aspects of history, such as economics or ideology, in their study of war. Much modern military history has remained what it has always been, simple chronicles of battles and leaders. Fortunately much of this is changing as a new group of military historians, as rigorously trained as their contemporaries in other fields of history, join the ranks of those few good men now writing.

Hopefully, this work is part of the new military history. While it is concerned, as military history must be, with armies and war, and specifically with the activity of the Indian Corps on the Western Front in the first year of World War I, it is also an attempt to use the experience of this force as a way to examine the minds of both the British officers and Indian soldiers who were a part of it. The crucial question of this study is not what happened, but why

it did. To answer that question, I have been forced to turn to analytical tools not normally used by military historians; anthropology, sociology, and psychoanalytical theory.

Even modern social scientists studying current problems have great difficulty in fully supporting their conclusions. How much more difficult for us historians. They at least can study existing people and institutions while ours, by definition, lay in the past. Also, social science models are imperfect at best and misleading at worst. Finally, we have seldom been fully trained in any of the disciplines of the social sciences, and in using them we run the risk of superficial and shallow explanation. Use them however we must, for if we ignore them we cast away the best tools we have for explanation, and history without explanation is mere description.

What has been said up to now applies to many historians, but military history bears an especially heavy burden. Too many of us are not historians at all, but military officers and buffs who, whatever their other virtues, have seldom, at least in the modern period, been noted for their imaginative investigations of anything, let alone the historical process. Particularly we have failed to consider the impact of cultural factors, such as ideology, on the decisions of military leaders. Military historians have generally assumed that the ability to construct an effective military force is inherent in the modern state, and is constrained only by material factors, such as industrial might, population base, and the like. While some of us have accepted that domestic political

realities can constrain a leadership, few of us have examined, or even considered, how cultural bias and ethnocentrism can influence and limit military decisions. For example, during World War II, the Japanese military leadership never understood why the United States would not accept what seemed to them the sensible solution, a negotiated peace. Nor did our military leadership understand why the Japanese soldier, sailor, or airman would throw away his life for no rational military advantage. The answer of course is that both leaderships were limited by their "weltanschauung", the way they selected, analyzed, interpreted, and acted upon data.

As a historian interested in both the social sciences and in the impact of culture on military forces, I have long been fascinated by the British Indian Army. Here, officers from western bureaucratic-technological culture came into direct contact with soldiers drawn from a South Asian peasantry. Here two "weltanschauungs" confronted and cooperated with each other. If we are to believe the British, it was a remarkably successful combination, for they believed they understood Indians and were able to transform them into western style soldiers in western type military units.

Fortunately for the military historian, the efficiency of an army is easy to examine, for battle is a simple and excellent indicator of an army's performance. However, up until 1914, Indian units had fought only ill-armed tribesman, surely not an adequate test. Thus my attention centered on the experience of the Indian soldiers on the Western Front

in 1914-1915. Here for the first time, they met a European enemy, and their success or failure could provide evidence as to how well the British officer corps had done its job. Unfortunately, the published material available provided neither evidence of success nor explanation of failure.

The two sources which deal specifically with the activity of the Indian Corps in France, The Indian Corps in France (London: John Murray, 1917) by Lt-Colonel J. W. B. Merewether and Sir Frederick Smith, the official historians, and the memoirs of the Corps Commander, General Sir James Willcocks, With the Indians in France (London: Constable & Co., 1920) shed no light on the problem. Both are little more than a list of exploits of units and individuals, and are in the worst traditions of military history. The official history of the British Expeditionary Force during the period the Corps fought in France is Brigadier-General Sir James E. Edmonds' Military Operations: France and Belgium (London: Macmillan, Vol. I, 1922, revised 1933; Vol. II, 1925; Vol. III, 1927) which gives little mention of the Indians. It does provide a series of explanations for the Corp's withdrawal, but gives no evidence to support its conclusions. Further, these do not ring true, and, as shown by my research, are not. The rest of the voluminous material on the Western Front mentions the Indians only in passing or not at all. Even John Gooch's otherwise excellent The Plans of War (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974) devotes the entire chapter on India to the period to 1907, before plans were set afoot to send Indian troops to

Europe in case of European war. Thus a study of the Indian Corps in France not only fills a gap in the historiography of the First World War, but is also an ideal way to examine the influence of cultural bias on military decisions.

Before proceeding to the body of this study, a few words about the Indian Army are in order. The British Army in India from which was drawn the force which went to France consisted of two separate but related military forces. The first was composed of portions of the British Army which regularly sent battalions to serve in India. A British infantry battalion was composed of a little more than 800 men, all of whom were white, led by 28 British officers. The second was the Indian Army. Its units were composed of Indian soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and officers, and of British officers, the most junior of which outranked the most senior Indian.

In 1914, an Indian infantry battalion consisted of eight companies, formed into four double-companies. The noncommissioned officers of each company were Indians, as was its commander, a subadar, equivalent to a captain, and its second-in-command, a jemedar, equivalent to a lieutenant. Each double-company was commanded by a British captain or major, with a British subaltern as second-in-command. Thus a battalion going on active service would consist of a British Lt-Colonel as Commander, a second-in-command, usually a Major, an Adjutant with the rank of Captain, a Quarter-Master, and a Medical Officer, all in the battalion headquarters, and two British officers per double company, for a total of 12 field

officers and one Medical officer per battalion of infantry. Each company had two Indian officers, and in the battalion headquarters would be found the Subadar-Major, the senior Indian officer of the battalion, for a total of 17 Indian officers per battalion. Each company had about 90 Indian soldiers, or "sepoys" or "jahwans" giving the battalion a full fighting strength of 12 British field officers, 17 Indian officers, and about 720 sepoy.

The men of each company within the battalion were always drawn from the same "jati", or caste or clan. Normally, companies of different jatis made up the battalion, although some battalions, notably Gurkhas, were caste pure.

An Indian regiment consisted of a regimental depot located in India and usually a single combat unit, a battalion, administered by and in peacetime colocated with the depot. Some regiments had more than one battalion, notably Gurkha regiments, but the single battalion regiment was the general rule. The regimental depot did not go with the combat battalion when it went on active service, and battalions of the same regiment when it was a multi-battalion regiment did not generally serve in the same brigade.

Since the battalion and the regiment in most units were one and the same, officers on active service generally spoke of their battalions as though they were the regiments. If he said, "My regiment did well today", he was usually referring to his battalion rather than his regiment. In order to prevent confusion, I have consistently used the term battalion to

identify the unit in France, and regiment only when referring to the battalion and depot together. However, the reader should be aware that British personnel did not often make this distinction. Also, when mentioning units in the text, I have used the normal shortened form. Thus the 2nd Battalion 8th Gurkha Rifles will be identified as the 2/8th Gurkhas and the 129th Duke of Connaught's Own Baluchis simply as the 129th Baluchis.

When the Army in India organized a combat force, it normally drew the combat battalion from the regimental depot and grouped several of these into brigades comprised of one British battalion and three Indian battalions. Three infantry brigades, plus cavalry, artillery, engineers, and supply and service troops made up a division, and two or more divisions a Corps. The Indian Corps in France consisted of two Indian divisions, the Lahore and the Meerut. Excluding all but the infantry, the Order of Battle of each was as follows.

LAHORE DIVISION

Ferozepore Brigade

*1st Battalion Connaught Rangers
 129th Duke of Connaught's Own Baluchis
 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force)
 9th Bhopal Infantry

Jullundur Brigade

*1st Battalion Manchester Regiment
 15th Ludhiana Sikhs
 47th Sikhs
 59th Scinde Rifles (Frontier Force)

* Denotes British unit.

Sirhind Brigade

- *1st Battalion Highland Light Infantry
- 1st Battalion 1st King George's Own Gurkha Rifles
- 1st Battalion 4th Gurkha Rifles
- 125th Napier's Rifles

MEERUT DIVISION

Dehra Dun Brigade

- *1st Battalion Seaforth Highlanders
- 1st Battalion 9th Gurkha Rifles
- 2nd Battalion 2nd King Edward's Own Gurkha Rifles
- 6th Jat Light Infantry

Garwhal Brigade

- *2nd Battalion Leicestershire Regiment
- 2nd Battalion 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles
- 1st Battalion 39th Garwhal Rifles
- 2nd Battalion 39th Garwhal Rifles

Bareilly Brigade

- *2nd Battalion Black Watch
- 41st Dogras
- 58th Vaughn's Rifles (Frontier Force)
- 2nd Battalion 8th Gurkha Rifles

Another way to measure the strength of the Corps is to realize that at full strength it consisted of about 5,000 British and 13,000 Indian infantry, plus several thousand support troops.

The perceptive reader will note that this study mentions the Indian cavalry of the Indian Corps not at all and the British infantry only a little. There are good reasons for this. The Indian cavalry, like all cavalry in trench warfare, saw very limited action and was not subject to the high casualties of trench warfare. It was therefore little tested by its experience. The British infantry of the Indian

divisions served as a useful check for the Indian battalions. It served in the same brigades, saw the same actions, and took the same proportion of casualties, but it did not suffer the same drop in fighting efficiency as did the Indians. Further, this is a study of the Indian Army, not the British. In any case, both the British infantry and Indian cavalry were not withdrawn from France in November of 1915, for their morale and capability were still high.

One final note. Military organizations, like other bureaucracies, tend to develop their own terminologies, often at variance both with terms in general use, and even with terms used by other military forces. Whenever possible, I have left British terminology intact, except where it would confuse American readers. One such term is "reinforcements." In the British Army of this period, that meant replacements, men sent to make up losses caused by death, disease, or wounds, not as additions to the normal strength of the force as it would in the American Army. To prevent confusion, I have, except for direct quotes, used the more familiar American term.

1. THE INDIAN ARMY

By 1900, the colonial possessions of Great Britain encircled the world, seemingly a series of unrelated territories, but the linchpin of the Empire was India, and around India the British Empire revolved. Most of Britain's 19th century colonial adventures had evolved out of the need to protect and exploit its Indian Empire. Within the British Cabinet, all of Britain's other colonies were administered by the Secretary of State for the Colonies but India had a Minister of its own. Not only did it have its own Minister, but it also had its own autonomous government and, keeping the peace and protecting its territory, its own army.

The military organization by which the British were first to conquer and then to hold the Indian sub-continent began not as a single military force, but as three. India is a rhomboid over 4000 kilometers long and the same in width. When the British arrived early in the 17th century, communications were rudimentary, and no roads existed between the three British trading centers of Bombay on the west coast, Madras on the southeast coast, and Bengal on the northeast. Each of the three trading centers, called Presidencies, therefore began as a separate administrative unit responsible not to a central Indian authority, but to the home office of their English trading company parent, the Honourable East India Company. AS

each Presidency determined a need for armed forces, each began its own army, individually recruited, trained, organized, and administered.¹⁻¹

The first armed forces of the Company were English guards at their trading centers,¹⁻² but these were soon supplemented by Englishmen recruited by the Company in England and sent out to India. The first thirty reached India in 1644 to garrison Fort St. George in the Madras Presidency.¹⁻³ The recruitment of Indians did not begin until 1662 when King Charles II received Bombay from the Portuguese as part of his wife's dowry. He sent 400 English soldiers to garrison his new possession, but the Portuguese authorities, unaware of the change of ownership, refused to let the men land. Confined to a small island, most died of disease. As sufficient Englishmen were not available to replace them, the British were forced to enlist non-English Europeans and Indians. Thus began the practice of enlisting Indians for military service under British command. When, in 1688, King Charles turned Bombay over to the East India Company, this regiment passed into the Company's service.¹⁻⁴

The use of Indians as soldiers had major advantages for the Company. A British recruit cost the Company a great deal of money, £30 in the early 18th century.¹⁻⁵ Not only was the initial cost high, but once in India he died from disease at a rate three times greater than his fellow recruit stationed in England¹⁻⁶ or of the native population.¹⁻⁷ An Indian soldier could not only be expected to outlive his English counterpart,

but he could also be paid a great deal less. The two together made the average cost per British soldier double that of an Indian.¹⁻⁸

By the beginning of the 18th century, events both in India and Europe gave great impetus to the use of Indian soldiers. In India, the Moghul Empire entered its final decline and British traders could no longer depend on the Emperor in Delhi to protect their interests. In Europe, France had already begun its hundred year attempt at European hegemony, which would place Britain at war with France off and on for most of that period. These wars often spread to India where the French pioneered the raising of Indian regiments trained and organized like European forces and under the command of French officers. The British had already discovered that a few disciplined British troops could defeat the large but untrained, disorganized, and unwieldy Indian armies. Now, given the French example, they saw that Indians could be transformed into reasonable likenesses of European troops.¹⁻⁹

When Robert Clive took command of the operationally combined Presidency armies during the Seven Years War, he turned quickly to the French system to raise troops, forming regiments on the British pattern. He placed Indians in command of these regiments, but to enable them to operate within the British system, he attached several noncommissioned and commissioned British officers to each regiment.¹⁻¹⁰ However, Indians commanded, for at this time, the British

considered them intelligent, honest, and competent enough to hold military command

In the last half of the 18th century, use of these Indian regiments increased and the British began to use them outside India in other colonial campaigns. In 1762, some took part in the capture of Manila. In 1795 some campaigned in Ceylon, and in 1801 took part in the Egyptian expedition.¹⁻¹¹ By 1794, the Indian regiments had proved so reliable, effective, and inexpensive that 82,000 Indians were under arms for the Company and that number would expand to 214,000 by 1856. In the meantime however, the Company had changed character. In 1784 the Company faced bankruptcy and appealed to the British government for a loan. Aware that the Company had become more a government than a trading enterprise, the government felt it time to bring the Company under more direct control. The India Act of 1784 empowered the British government to appoint the majority of the Company's Directors. In 1794, the Directors sent Lord Cornwallis, the loser at Yorktown during the American Revolution, to India as Governor-General.

The arrival of Lord Cornwallis symbolized both an end and a beginning. In Europe, the dynastic era was ending in the cauldron of the French Revolution and its aftermath, and the process which took Europe from the position of one among several world civilizations to that of unchallenged dominance had begun. The Europeans who had come to India during the 18th century had been men of the Enlightenment, heirs to a tradition of radical rationalism. They knew that their

culture was different from that of India, but they did not think of it as necessarily superior. Also they had come as supplicants to functioning, efficient, and powerful Moghul Empire. But the decline of Moghul power coincided with the European industrial revolution and the rise of European nation-states. European technology, coupled with the first modern bureaucracies, gave the Europeans an immense advantage over the governments, peoples, and military forces of the non-European world. Aware that European technology was so clearly superior to India's, it was but a short step for the current Europeans in India to conclude that all things European were superior to all things Indian.

Other factors operant in the 19th century increased the psychological distance between the British and the Indians. The first half of the century coincided with a great increase in Evangelical Protestantism in Britain, and the British officer of an Indian regiment was affected by it. His Christian religiosity often caused him to decry and condemn native ways, customs, and religions which he did not fully understand.¹⁻¹² Further, as the century wore on and as the British settled into India, the steamship brought fast, reliable transportation between Britain and India. Small islands of British culture could now be established, maintained by the wives of British officers and officials who now began to arrive. Thus even the need for women, which had at least given the British officer some contact with the Indian people on a personal level disappeared.

The new British view of India was based on certain real aspects of Indian culture. The base of the Indian social structure was role differentiation based on birth, the "jati" or caste system. Hierarchical caste lines were theoretically immutable. Into this system the British idea of themselves and of their place in India fitted neatly. Concentrating on the anarchy of the late 18th and 19th century and ignoring the long periods of Indian political unity, they saw India as composed of inherently hostile subgroups among whom order could be maintained only by impartial outsiders, themselves.

All of these ideas made an impact on the organization of the Indian Army. Indians had not commanded regiments since the days of Clive, but they still provided most of the officers. In the reorganization of 1796, most of them were replaced by British officers, thereby reducing the possibilities for advancement for Indian soldiers.¹⁻¹³ As a result of these reforms, the number of British officers per regiment increased from 12 to 22 and, as most of them had little to do during peacetime, the Company often gave them essentially civilian positions outside the regiment and also followed standard British practice of allowing liberal leaves. Thus, at any given time, only six or seven officers out of the 22 assigned might be present with the regiment.

During this entire period, the British continued to expand the Indian Army. Between 1796 and 1824, the number of battalions increased from 52 infantry and 7 cavalry to 144 infantry and 21 cavalry.¹⁻¹⁴ A further expansion occurred in

1848 after the 2nd Sikh War. To patrol the now extended frontiers in the Punjab, additional troops were raised. Further, Lord Dalhousie's policy of annexing any Indian state which, in his opinion, either lapsed into anarchy or lacked a legitimate heir led to further increases in the number of Indian troops as each state annexed needed additional soldiers for a garrison. Along with the steady rise in the number of Indian troops, a steady reduction in the number of European troops occurred. The Crimean War sucked British regiments from India which were never replaced, as did the 2nd Burmese War and the 1856 Persian Expedition. By 1856, less than 10% of the troops in India were British.¹⁻¹⁵

The great changes in British attitudes about India were mirrored by changes in the attitudes of the Indian soldier. Like peasants everywhere, he was deeply conservative and looked with great suspicion on what he perceived as the threat to property, political order, and religion by the British.

Regarding property, the soldiers were almost all landowners, and many were Brahmins whose families were dependent on religious foundations. The British reformers of the post 1820 period were ideologically committed to the idea that the peasant should own and work his own land. They examined the claim of every landowner and petty chief and seized any excuse to declare them invalid. The British did not realize that they threatened not just the great noble but everyone who did not actually plow the soil and who paid taxes. Unlike Britain, in India the social distinction between the small

landowner and the tenant was not rigid, and among the soldiers spread an uncertainty as to their property rights. Additionally, the annexation policy of Dalhousie made them suspicious of British promises as state after state which the British had promised to respect was incorporated into the Empire.

Finally, and most important, the sepoys felt a general threat to their religion. While missionary activity directed from Britain was private, the Indian soldier did not distinguish between the missionary and his supporters, who often included British officers and soldiers, and the official non-support policy of the government. The belief grew that the government was only waiting for a favorable moment to enforce conversion to Christianity. Further, in their desire for morality and efficiency, the British ignored the religious implications of many of their laws. Government interference in property rights and widow remarriage were seen by Indians, whose religion embraced all aspects of social activity, as interference in religious practice.

In 1857, all dissatisfaction in the army culminated as the Army of the Honourable East India Company disintegrated in a configuration of sedition and mutiny, drowned in blood, and brutalized with British and Indian atrocities. To have the sword by which they held India turned against them left a legacy the British never forgot. At the end of the Mutiny, only 15 of the 70 regular infantry regiments of the Bengal line had proved loyal, and none of the cavalry.¹⁻¹⁶

The reforms in the Army engendered by the Mutiny were many. The East India Company was abolished and the government of India placed directly under the Crown. So was the Army. Internally, much was changed in the army. First, the British began a long term policy of restricting enlistment to castes whose loyalty could be assured. In practice, this meant recruiting from religious or ethnic minorities whose privileged status depended on the continuation of British rule. Gradually, the number of men in the army from the heart of India was reduced, while men from the border areas, Sikhs, Punjabi Muslims, and Gurkhas increased. Second, pure caste regiments were mostly eliminated. Companies within the various regiments remained caste pure to insure against ritual pollution, but unrelated and often hostile caste companies were combined into the same regiment so that the risk of uniformity of anti-British feeling would be unlikely to arise.¹⁻¹⁷ By 1912, almost all the cavalry regiments were mixed caste, and, except for the 20 Gurkha regiments, only 30 of the remaining 104 infantry regiments were caste pure.¹⁻¹⁸

Third, the Government altered the tactical disposition of the Army. It was no longer concentrated at strategic points, but scattered in small garrisons throughout the country. Whenever possible, Hindu and Muslim regiments were stationed together to minimize the risk of common sentiment. Also, British troops and artillery were always stationed with Indian troops.

Fourth, as a pattern for the post-mutiny regiments, the British looked to the irregular regiments which had remained loyal to them during the Mutiny and which had fought well. These regiments had only six British officers, compared to the 22 in the old Indian regiment. With the reorganization, only eight British officers were assigned to each Indian regiment, leaving the remaining positions for Indians.¹⁻¹⁹ Thus it was now possible for an Indian to rise to a position of some responsibility, status, and authority, coopting his loyalty rather than frustrating his ambition.

Finally, the British altered the weaponry of the army. Because the regiments of Indian artillery had used their guns particularly well against the British and had caused many British casualties, the British were determined never again to place artillery in Indian hands, and except for some light mountain guns, they never waivered in their decision.¹⁻²⁰ And, while Indian soldiers would have to have shoulder weapons, he would get new equipment only when his British counterpart had received an even better model.¹⁻²¹

In the period after the Mutiny until the onset of the First World War, the Indian Army underwent a process of a steady reduction in size as costs per unit increased and greater firepower enabled one unit to do the work of many. By 1897, the army was down to 185,000 men,¹⁻²² and by 1906 it had shrunk to less than 160,000 Indian soldiers.¹⁻²³ Nonetheless, the army which emerged from the Mutiny held and protected the Indian Empire for the remainder of the 19th century. It was

a garrison army now, organized to control the civilian population and ward off bands of marauding tribesmen, rather than to fight a major war.

Campaigning in India and in the colonial campaigns in which the Indian Army often fought was very different from fighting in Europe. Most of the difficulty was due less to the strength of the enemy than to the nature of the type of war he fought and the usually difficult terrain. Indian troops normally fought poorly organized and equipped irregulars. On the frontiers of India, the tribes were so disorganized that troops opposing them could never be sure what proportion of a given tribe or people had taken up arms, and were therefore never sure at what strength they should take the field. But disorganized as they were, irregulars generally operated on their home ground and were therefore more likely to have good intelligence about the British than the British about them. They had the civilian population to draw on, while the British had to depend on spies and patrols.¹⁻²⁴

As the terrain on the frontier was not well known, a major mission of the intelligence branch was to send reconnaissance teams into areas on the frontier of which it had little knowledge. Often British officers would be sent out in disguise to make an extended inspection of the area.¹⁻²⁵ The nature of the enemy, the climate, and the terrain dictated that colonial campaigns ought to be short so that the enemy would not have time to organize, supply problems not have time to become severe, and the effects of a possibly unhealthy

climate not have time to decimate the troops before they could engage the enemy.¹⁻²⁶

The British believed that the essence of irregular war was to establish moral superiority over the enemy. Unlike conventional war, the enemy had no supply lines to attack and could easily disperse to fight another day. Thus, forcing him to battle where the superior discipline and firepower of the regular force could produce large enemy casualties without great losses of one's own was the object of every commander. Ideally, the British force would strike vigorously and constantly to make the waiverers go home and the unsure stay in their huts.¹⁻²⁷

Campaigning on the Indian frontier was often a fight against nature as well as a fight against the enemy. If it was impossible for the army to live off the land, as it often was for the frontier was sparsely settled and very rough, the army could become merely an escort for its food.¹⁻²⁸ This dependence on its supply line could be likened to carrying a chain behind the force with the other end attached to the supply base. The further the force got from the base, the longer and heavier got the chain. The solution was the flying column. In this case the force carried their supplies with them. However this had its disadvantages as well. The large amount of supplies carried could slow down the column and if the supplies were captured, the force would have to retreat quickly to its base. On the other hand, properly planned and

executed, the column could work miracles, as it did for Lord Roberts in his march to Kabul in 1878.¹⁻²⁹

The Indian Army's basic combat unit was the brigade, usually composed of several Indian battalions and one British battalion. Normal procedure was to attack with the Indian battalions, keeping the British battalion in reserve. As one British General put it, "always in those days the British soldier stood as a rock, should anything go wrong with his Indian comrades or should the nut be too hard for them to crack."¹⁻³⁰ While that was probably true, it was also true that sending the Indians into the assault first lowered the casualties of the white troops.

The lessons of the Indian frontier and of the colonial campaigns were of mixed benefit to the British and Indian Armies during the First World War. On the positive side, their officers learned to be aggressive, conscious of supply and terrain problems, and careful of their wounded. They also became adept at hasty fortifications and at searching for an open flank. On the negative side, since they were usually reluctant to use artillery since it often dispersed the enemy before the infantry could close and kill, they had no idea of the killing power of massed artillery. Further, always probing for the flank, they never learned how to penetrate a fortified position. While the German Army had not fought a campaign since 1870, and went into battle in 1914 with untried officers and men, the British and Indian Armies had fought a succession of skirmishes and colonial wars. Yet the German

Army proved far readier for modern war than the British or Indian forces.

The men who officered the Indian Army were a peculiar breed. They accepted voluntary exile from home for the privilege of serving an Empire whose opinion of the professional soldier was lower than in any other European nation. But for a British "gentleman" who aspired to the social status of an officer, the Indian Army offered certain unique opportunities. To be an officer in a British regiment in the latter part of the 19th century required an outside income of anywhere from £150 to £1500, depending on the regiment, to maintain the expected standard of living.¹⁻³¹ On the other hand, the cost of living in India was much lower than in Britain, and officers of the Indian Army were not expected to maintain the standard of living of British officers of the British Army.¹⁻³² Further, the pay of a junior officer in the Indian Army was considerably higher than that of his British Army counterpart. In 1876, an Indian Army lieutenant made over 60% more than a British Army lieutenant.¹⁻³³ Not surprisingly, officers of the Indian Army tended to come from the less affluent sections of the British middle classes.¹⁻³⁴ There were of course other reasons. Life in India offered a romance and a quasi-aristocratic status no longer available in Britain, and, for the ambitious, irregular war offered greater responsibility to junior officers than did conventional campaigning. Thus the relatively poor and ambitious sought service with the Indian Army. With all its disadvantages, places in the Indian Army

were much sought after. In 1913, the top ten graduates of Sandhurst, 20 of the top 25, and 32 of the top 47 requested service with the Indian Army.¹⁻³⁵

The military education of a young officer began at Sandhurst, but the standard of performance there was generally low. The Victorian British army put more store in spit-and-polish than in intellectual attainment. After leaving Sandhurst, if a subaltern wished a posting to an Indian regiment, he had to serve a year's probation with a British regiment in India, and pass an examination in an Indian language and another in various military subjects.¹⁻³⁶ There, for all practical purposes, his formal military training stopped. Indian officers who were awarded postings at Camberley at the Staff College usually chose not to go, for there an officer's expenses exceeded his income by over £200 per year. In 1905, Kitchener, then Commander-in-Chief in India established a Staff College in India to overcome this difficulty.¹⁻³⁷ This was too late to insure that very many of the senior officers of the Indian Army had had such training by 1914.

The social life of the regiment was not designed to encourage a broad outlook in junior officers. An infantry mess might consist of as few as seventeen officers, and their life revolved completely around the regiment. Independent opinions were not encouraged. As one officer put it,

It was assumed automatically that a captain was more intelligent than a lieutenant, and a major more than a captain and so on. As for expressing an opinion

which differed from the general point of view, that was almost unheard of. . . .¹⁻³⁸

Within the regiment, social graces, athletic ability, and the correct attitude¹⁻³⁹ mattered a good deal more than military competence, which in any case consisted of little more than the ability to look good on parade. Of course, if an officer had the ambition and social connections necessary, he could secure a posting to a frontier regiment.

In short, the Officer Corps of the Indian Army prior to World War I was an institution whose members could be expected to exhibit great personal bravery, physical fortitude, and even in some cases, initiative within conventional patterns. But it was also class-conscious, extraordinarily conservative, and badly trained for a general European war. Further, it was racist to the core. The officers who led Indian soldiers believed they did so because they were inherently, racially, superior to Indians. The British officer might love, and even admire his men, but he never forgot, nor was he allowed to forget, that he was inherently better than they.

The leadership of the Indian Army was British, but its soldiers were Indians, but not all Indians. As has already been mentioned, the Mutiny caused a great shift in British recruiting patterns. Prior to the Mutiny, recruitment for men was somewhat haphazard. Regimental commanders largely determined whether or not to enlist a particular caste. Even as late as 1876, Jews and Christians served in some Bombay regiments.¹⁻⁴⁰ By the latter part of the century however, racism

dominated the intellectual movement of the educated classes of Europe, and it is not surprising that the theory of the "martial races" entered Indian Army thought at this time. Lord Roberts, when Commander-in-Chief, first officially expressed the theory. While not precisely a racist, he did believe that certain castes and groups in India could fight better than others. He differed from the pure racists in ascribing this to climate and other conditions, rather than a genetic heritage.¹⁻⁴¹

The most popular writer on Indian Army affairs and the most literate exponent of the martial race theory was Lt-General Sir George MacMunn. He combined a romantic view of the "martial" castes with a complete contempt for those he defined as non-martial.

. . . in India we speak of the martial races as a thing apart and because the mass of the people have neither martial aptitude or physical courage . . . the courage we talk of colloquially as "guts". . . .

The clever trading classes of India have never borne the sword by their side, the tradesmen, the artificers, the goldsmiths, all that come under the ancient grooming of the Vaisha, twice borne though they be, have none of the instincts that answer blow with blow. It is one thing to suffer a blow and turn the other cheek, in humility and self restraint. It is quite another to do so from fear.¹⁻⁴²

MacMunn believed that 4000 years previously a white race similar to the British had conquered India. His "martial races" were descended from those Aryan invaders, or from a later group of conquerors, the Jats, or a variant of the Tartars, the Gurkhas.¹⁻⁴³

This attitude had an enormous impact on recruiting patterns. By 1912, out of the hundreds of castes and classes of India, the cavalry recruited from 20 and the infantry from only 24.¹⁻⁴⁴ Most of the castes considered "martial" were from the Punjab, and this in turn led to the Punjabization of the Army. In 1862, only 25% of the infantry battalions were Punjabi or Gurkha. By 1914, that figure had reached 64%.¹⁻⁴⁵ Even the enlistment on occasion of an individual not of a martial caste and his rise to high rank with evidence of great personal bravery did not change the position of the Officer Corps that only certain groups could fight.¹⁻⁴⁶

The Punjabization of the army meant an increased drain on the recruiting grounds of northern India, which meant that a more elaborate recruiting system was needed. British officers often spent much of their time on recruiting duty, and pay raises and better conditions did much to make their work successful.¹⁻⁴⁷

The Martial Race theory was a mixed blessing to the British. It had some advantages. By designating certain groups as fighters and offering them military careers, it co-opted their loyalty, and set caste against caste in the time honored method of divide and rule. Also, since the

British habitually chose peasant castes as "martial", and since these, in addition to being inured to hardship and amenable to discipline, were ill-educated and politically backward, their loyalty was assured.¹⁻⁴⁸ Finally, it gave another ideological justification for the continuance of British rule, for it implied that without the British, the northern martial races would conquer the south and oppress its peoples.¹⁻⁴⁹

However, there were also major disadvantages to the theory. While those castes selected as martial might have reason to stay loyal to the British, the others had an additional grievance. The average British officer might not like the "babu", or clerk, but he was precisely the type of educated Indian who was likely to be at the center of an anti-British movement. Also, with the increasing democratization of Great Britain, it became more and more difficult to justify this theory to a government whose roots were less and less aristocratic.¹⁻⁵⁰ Further, it prevented the army from turning to other castes when a need for more troops arose. Finally, by defining the educated classes of India as non-martial, they limited their officer supply to those of British descent. To take a young British officer and educate him in the complexities and language of a foreign culture took years. Thus the British ability to replace officer casualties was limited.

The system was nonetheless remarkably able to prove all that the British believed. If those Indians who were martial couldn't become officers since they were inherently inferior, it made little sense to expect or encourage them to exhibit

officer characteristics of leadership and initiative. Not being expected to do so (and one cannot help but suspect that if one had done so, he would have made his superior British officers very uncomfortable) and being selected from castes whose background least fitted them for an officer role, we should not be surprised to learn that they did not. This reinforced the British belief in their own superiority and indispensability. Further, as those Indians whose drive and education most fit them for an officer role were defined as non-martial, it made no sense to allow them to try. Besides, they were distressingly political in their desire to force changes in the status quo.

Between the Indian soldier and his British officer stood an intermediate figure, the Viceroy's Commissioned Officer, or VCO. He was an Indian who held commissioned rank but whose commission was issued by the viceroy rather than the king. The British officer of the Indian Army held his from the British government, the King's Commission, and any King's Commissioned Officer outranked any Viceroy's Commissioned Officer, no matter what the disparity in rank or position. The VCO had power of command over native troops only. He provided a link between the British officer and the Indian soldiers and also provided a source of leadership, inspiration, and example that the British officer of a different culture could not give. 1-51

The origins of the VCO can be traced to Robert Clive who retained Indian officers in the regiments to which he attached

British officers.¹⁻⁵² By the end of the 19th century the role of the VCO had much changed. The VCO was promoted from the ranks, generally after many years of service. They were unfamiliar with anything beyond company level duties, and since they were uneducated, they could not be trained to manage the administrative duties required for higher rank, or for staff positions. Thus when British officers became casualties, the VCOs were not able to take their place.¹⁻⁵³ Indeed, it became an article of faith that they were inherently unable to do so.

Thus, at the beginning of the First World War, the Indian Army was organized around a series of principles which might best be grouped under the term, "paternalistic racism." Its roots lay in the very real superiority of European technology and organization, the necessity of ruling India via an Indian army, the experience of the Great Mutiny, and the "scientific" doctrine of Social Darwinism, and the racism it implied. But although the British were racist, they were not simple exploiters. Leavening the belief that Indians were inherently inferior was the belief that Christian morality demanded that one's inferiors be treated as humanly as possible, as a father would treat a somewhat backward child. That the British officer was steeped in this ideology is beyond doubt. He further cloaked it in an extraordinary romanticism.

This combination of loyalty and expectation . . . was something officers and men understood without words. It knit them in a close bond, from which

the rest of the world was excluded. . . . For a soldier, disloyalty was treason, the worst of all offenses. For him there was no half-way house; he must give total obedience, total loyalty, total devotion. 1-54

The far more mundane reality was that the Indian soldier's view of himself fell somewhat short of that. He had enlisted because the Army provided an excellent career. It gave him food, a reasonable salary, a decent pension, and the possibility of occasional adventure. In return he gave a conditional obedience, a conditional loyalty, a conditional devotion. As long as he was asked to be a garrison soldier, or to take part in colonial campaigns or minor frontier operations in which battles were short and casualties light, he was content to serve. But when service meant the mud and death of Flanders in 1914-15, the conditions under which he enlisted had changed. So, inevitably did his obedience, his loyalty, his devotion.

If the Indian Army had continued in its traditional roles of defending the North-West Frontier, suppressing civil unrest, and taking part in minor colonial campaigns, it might have gone on doing so indefinitely, but in 1914 it was sent to fight a modern European war. It failed. This study is an examination of that failure.

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2. TO A EUROPEAN BATTLEFIELD

At the turn of the 20th century, the eyes of the Indian Army rested on the North-West Frontier and on the only great power that had the capacity to disturb British rule on the sub-continent, Russia. For almost the whole of the preceding century, Britain's leaders had followed a policy of containment of Russia. Britain's overwhelming mastery of the seas made most of her Empire and the home island itself invulnerable to Russian counter-action, but the North-West Frontier of India was an exception. Should the Russians move through Persia and Afghanistan, Britain would be hard pressed to defend her Indian Empire. The military leadership of the Indian Army assumed that Russia was hostile. As Field Marshal Lord Roberts, ex-Commander-in-Chief in India and the hero of the 2nd Afghan War put it in 1904,

no one can surely have any doubt as to what Russia's real intentions are, or that, unless we are able to arrest her further progress, she will inevitably overrun Afghanistan, and be in a position to invade India.²⁻¹

Far from being able to export troops overseas in case of a major war, the main concern of the Indian High Command was the substantial number of reinforcements they felt would be

needed from Britain.²⁻² The only question was how many. As Russia grew stronger and closer, the number of home based British troops desired by the Government of India increased from 13,700 in 1886 to 148,133 in 1906.²⁻³

Russia's obvious weakness following her defeat in the Russo-Japanese War and the subsequent internal unrest led the leaders of both Britain and Russia to make a more realistic appraisal of the military situation. Also, the growing strength and hostility of Germany to both powers led to a rapprochement between the two countries which affected military planning for India. In 1906, the Secretary of State for India, Lord John Morley, and the Foreign Secretary, Sir Edward Gray, argued that Russia's weakness and Britain's cordial relations with France would permit a reduction in the size of the Indian Army. Lord Gilbert Minto, the Viceroy, and Lord Horatio Kitchener, the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army disagreed, stating that diplomatic agreements did not change the nature of a real military threat.²⁻⁴ Debate on this question continued for several years with the military and the Government of India opposing reductions and the rest of the Cabinet supporting cuts. The question was more than academic, for the number of reinforcements needed by India was the prime factor in determining the size of the regular British Army.

The reverses of the Boer War had caused great concern in Britain and had led to a complete reappraisal of its military establishment. As part of this process, Prime Minister Asquith, in 1907, appointed a special sub-committee of the new

Committee of Imperial Defence to consider the military requirements of the Empire. India was the key to the question, for, as Lord Morley put it,

In peace, these needs govern the normal size of the Army; in war, on our Indian land frontier, they make the largest demands upon our military resources.²⁻⁵

Military opinion was unanimous. Led by Field Marshal Lord Roberts, General Sir William Nicholson, Quarter-Master General and later Chief of the Imperial General Staff, General Sir Ian Hamilton, a hero of the Boer War and later to command the ill-fated Gallipoli expedition, and General Sir Beauchamp Duff, later Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army during World War I, all agreed that India would need substantial reinforcements in case of war.²⁻⁶ In May, 1907, the Committee of Imperial Defence accepted the military position and the principle that the British regular army ought to be able to send 100,000 men to India during the first year of a major war. The detailed estimate by the General Staff of the War Office was even higher, 148,000 including reinforcements and replacements.²⁻⁷

By 1909, the political situation had further developed. Germany's increasing military force, the growth of the German Navy, and the belligerency of the Kaiser worried British statesmen, who were now considering the possibility of sending troops to the Continent to assist France in a war with

Germany.²⁻⁸ Lord Morley, conscious of the new alignment, wrote the Viceroy, Lord Minto, regarding military expenses.

The expenditure of so great a sum at the present time . . . could only be justified if . . . mobilization of the whole field army is contemplated. . . . That eventuality is war with Russia . . . [the] view held by His Majesty's Government as . . . [the] Anglo-Russian Agreement . . . [is that] the Agreement has been subjected to and has successfully withstood, severe tests . . . and there is now less reason than ever for reluctance in adjusting military policy in India to the new conditions.²⁻⁹

In reply, Lord Minto admitted that the danger of Russia was now much reduced, but argued that the tribes on the North-West Frontier and the army of Afghanistan were now so well armed as to require the planned nine division force.²⁻¹⁰

By 1911, both faces and attitudes had changed. The new Liberal government appointed both a new Viceroy and a new Secretary of State for India. The new Viceroy, Lord Charles Hardinge had had a long and distinguished career in the Foreign Office, culminating in his appointment as Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Appointed Viceroy in 1910, he represented traditional Liberalism. Lord Robert Crewe, the new Secretary of State for India had served as Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland, Lord President of the Council, Lord Privy Seal, and Secretary of State for the Colonies before moving to India House. Asquith considered him the most

able of his colleagues in what has been described as the most brilliant Cabinet of the 20th century.²⁻¹¹

As a good Liberal, Hardinge believed in economy in military expenditure, and accepted that the size of the Indian Army ought to be reduced.

I feel strongly the absolute necessity of reducing the Native Army. . . . With the present change in the political situation . . . it is absurd to maintain as large a native Army as if there had been a danger of invasion by a first class power like Russia.²⁻¹²

But more important than the tactical question as to how many British and Indian troops ought to be maintained in India was the fact that the focus of British military policy had shifted from India to Europe, as Great Britain and Germany became increasingly antagonistic. For once, the military anticipated the politicians.

Early in 1911, General Nicholson, long a proponent of military cooperation with France against Germany, asked Sir Douglas Haig, then Chief of Staff of the Indian Army, and later to command the British Expeditionary Force in France, to consider the problem of despatching Indian troops to Europe in case of war with Germany.²⁻¹³ Haig devoted the annual General Staff Exercise to the problem, keeping it secret from Hardinge, who disapproved of the idea.²⁻¹⁴ Indeed, when Hardinge heard of the exercise, he ordered it cancelled, writing,

It is hardly necessary to discuss possible eventualities connected with Germany, Turkey, and other powers which the General Staff are of the opinion "may necessitate in the future an increase of the Army in India." Beyond minor operations in the Persian Gulf there is no likelihood in the immediate future of any operations against foreign powers in regions not contiguous with the frontiers of India.²⁻¹⁵

Sir J. E. W. Headlam, later a Major General, then a serving officer in India remembered the incident as follows.

A year or two before the war . . . Sir Douglas Haig devoted the annual General Staff exercise in India to a very detailed study of everything connected with the despatch of an Expeditionary Force of two Divisions and (I think) a Cavalry Brigade to Europe. . . . The whole question was studied for months in advance as well as at the actual exercise, and a detailed and very voluminous report was drawn up and presented. But the Viceroy heard of it . . . and he wrote a most intemperate minute, saying that the exercise should never have been held, that the idea was absurd, etc., and that it must never be referred to, etc.! I'm not sure he didn't order all the records to be burnt. . . . The point is that when the expedition was sent, the whole personnel at Hd Qrs had changed, and the report was not available.²⁻¹⁶

Precisely why Hardinge took this position is impossible to determine, but certainly Indian politicians resented the expense of the Army. The idea that Indian revenues were being used to support an Imperial Reserve would certainly have raised a political storm. Nevertheless, the British Cabinet continued to consider such a possibility.²⁻¹⁷ Winston Churchill, then Home Secretary, who had served in India as a lieutenant in the 4th Hussars from 1896 to 1898, commented,

As we shall be allies of Russia the Anglo-Indian Army could be drawn upon as long as two native regiments were moved out of India for every British regiment. Lord Kitchener has stated that it would be possible in so grave a need to withdraw six out of the nine field divisions from India, and this should be done immediately. This force could be brought into France by Marseilles by the fortieth day.²⁻¹⁸

Not for two years more however, in August of 1913, did the Cabinet ask the Government of India to consider how India could contribute to a war between Britain and a continental enemy.²⁻¹⁹ At that point, Hardinge had no choice but to consider the prospect of Indian troops being used in Europe. He wrote,

After careful consideration of our requirements in India we consider that the Army Council may, under normal conditions, rely on getting two divisions and one Cavalry Brigade, and that under

abnormal conditions we might possibly be able to increase this to three divisions, but this increase would be at some risk to ourselves and cannot be counted on with any degree of certainty. 2-20

The situation when war broke out in August, 1914 was therefore as follows. The Cabinet, the Army Council, the Government of India, and the Indian Army High Command had all agreed in principle that in case of a European war between Britain and Germany, Indian troops would be used outside of India, but the only detailed planning had been cancelled, and perhaps even destroyed by Hardinge's orders in 1911. Further, the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, General Sir Beauchamp Duff, was less than sanguine about the proposal.

Should the Empire be worsted in a Great War we shall lose India in any case; therefore from that point of view, it is in our interest to send every man we can to the decisive point, where the issue must be fought out, or to places where they can set free other troops to take part in that issue. On the other hand should we denude ourselves too much India may be lost to us through internal disturbance and external attack even though the Empire may be successful elsewhere. 2-21

As Germany sent her armies forward, the British government may have harbored the illusion that Britain might find some way to remain out of war, but the military leadership of

Britain had long accepted the fact that Britain would fight on the side of France. As far back as 1905, unofficial talks between representatives of the British and French armies had begun with the express purpose of examining how British land forces might be used on the Continent. Thus when Germany violated Belgian neutrality, Plan "W", the joint work of the British and French General Staffs, was complete to the last detail.²⁻²² On Britain's first day of war, August 5th, 1914, the Committee of Imperial Defence, after some debate, approved its implementation, and the wheels were set in motion for the movement of the small British Expeditionary Force to France.²⁻²³

At the same time, discussions began among the members of the War Council as to where the Indian divisions might best be used. Churchill, now First Lord of the Admiralty, suggested that they first be moved to Egypt to relieve British regulars there for use in France or elsewhere, and then later perhaps sent to France.²⁻²⁴ Hardinge, writing from India, and caught up in the war fever sweeping over most Europeans, had no doubt where he wished the Indian Army employed. Displaying a complete turnabout from his attitude of three years earlier, he wrote Crewe,

I know the two divisions that are under orders and they are composed of perfectly magnificent troops. I am absolutely certain that they would do well against any European troops they might meet. I do trust that they will not be left to garrison the Mediterranean

but will be sent up to the front. It would create an excellent impression in India that Indian troops should, for the first time, be employed against white troops in Europe.²⁻²⁵

By August 9th, the decision had been made and the 3rd and 7th Indian Divisions, later to be renamed the Lahore and Meerut Divisions to prevent confusion with regular British divisions with the same numbers, were ordered to embark for Egypt, with advance detachments to leave by the 15th. The order also stated that these troops "may be called upon to operate with the Expeditionary force in Europe at a later date."²⁻²⁶

Opinion was still divided as to whether the Indian troops ought to be used in Europe. Lord Sydenham, who had capped an outstanding military and civilian career with the Governorship of Bombay from 1907 to 1913, wrote Crewe about his reservations as to such use.

From the purely political point of view our main object as regards India should be: -

1. Not to give the slightest impression of dependence on the Indian Army &

2. Not to denude India of military force.

As regards (1) it is of the greatest importance that no sign of weakness should appear in India, - that Indian politicians should not be able to say in the future that Indian troops and Indian resources saved the Empire. Much political capital was made of the contingent sent to Africa in 1899.

Much more will be made of the despatch of two divisions to Europe now. The effect would be to convey the idea of our dependence on India and to fill Indian politicians in years to come with an exaggerated sense of the value of the assistance given and consequently of the political claims which could be based on that assistance. The certain result of this would be great political turmoil in the near future.²⁻²⁷

Yet despite these considerations and the fact that the Indian Army was neither trained nor equipped for a European war, Hardinge continued to press for its use in Europe.

There is such a universal desire throughout India that our troops should actually go to the front in Europe. . . . It will be the removal of a stigma and a colour bar upon Indian troops which British officers attached to them feel greatly, and which is felt equally by the men. No more popular move could be made than to send an Indian Division to the fighting in Europe.²⁻²⁸

For reasons undetermined, the Cabinet felt differently, and on August 25th decided not to use the Indian divisions in Europe.²⁻²⁹ Nonetheless, Hardinge continued to plead.

A wave of loyalty is sweeping the country based on the wish to assist the Empire actively against Germany in the field. . . . The enthusiasm is intense, but there is none whatever for the purely garrison

duty which your telegram contemplates. Should India see her splendid and complete divisions relegated to such duty while troops from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and other colonies go to the front, there will be a revulsion of feeling here which may have serious effect. It is well known in India that the French Algerian troops are fighting at the front, and if British Indian troops should be discarded in the present emergency it will be interpreted as an unmerited slur on their loyalty and efficiency . . . that our army is being unfairly treated. . . . This is a political mistake of the first magnitude, which, if persisted in may change the present feeling in the country.²⁻³⁰

Crewe attempted to console him.

. . . we must point out that it is not accurate to describe service in Egypt as purely garrison duty. If Turkey joins Germany as is still not improbable we shall regard Egypt as point of honour and danger. . . . As soon as it appears certain that they are not needed for active service in Egypt we shall at once consider question of employment of Indian troops on Continent. . . . You can assure your Council and Legislative Council that whenever opportunity offers, Indian troops will take their place in line with the other soldiers of the King's army.²⁻³¹

Opportunity offered faster than anyone imagined. The small British Expeditionary Force of two corps of two divisions each, under the command of Field Marshal Sir John French, a cavalryman of uncertain temperament and mediocre intelligence, began moving to its place on the extreme left of the French line. Sir John's marching orders required that the BEF reach the Mons Canal on August 23rd, the same day on which the German timetable called for General von Kluck's 1st Army to reach the identical line. Both armies met their timetables without delay, and from early morning of that day, von Kluck with 160,000 men and 600 guns hammered Field Marshal French's 70,000 men and 300 guns. By the next morning, the BEF, forced by the superior forces facing it and the withdrawal of the French on its right, was in full retreat. The cost of holding von Kluck's forces for a single day had been 1,600 British casualties.²⁻³² Worse was to follow. Two days later, after continuous exhausting retreat, on the same day that the Army Council and the Cabinet decided not to use the Indian divisions in Europe, von Kluck caught General Smith-Dorrien's IInd Corps at Le Cateau. For eleven hours on August 26th, that Corps, now reinforced by the 4th Division newly landed from England, fought off the Germans, losing 8,000 men and 38 guns. By the time Smith-Dorrien was able to extricate it, and the BEF managed to pull back far enough to get a breathing spell, the Germans had inflicted losses of almost 15,000 men in five days.²⁻³³

Even this background of disaster, the Cabinet changed its mind as to the use of the Indian Divisions, quite understandably, for the Indian Army offered the only source of trained reinforcements available anywhere in the Empire. On August 27th, only two days after the Cabinet's original decision and the day after the battle at Le Cateau, Secretary of War Kitchener informed French that the Indian divisions would be sent to France.²⁻³⁴ On the same day, Kitchener wired Duff informing him of the Cabinet's decision and asking for,

. . . the best possible forces of horse and foot.

The fighting is hard, and requires big battalions and stiff men.²⁻³⁵

Hardinge was delighted.

. . . universal satisfaction felt on all sides at the employment of Indian troops in Europe . . . the removal of the stigma of the colour bar and the recognition of their equality with the Colonials. . . . The presence of Indian troops has identified India with the war.²⁻³⁶

The officers of the Indian Army were equally happy.

We heard the great news yesterday that our destination is Marseilles. I never even dreamed that we could actually get into a European war in the Indian Army. It is too good to be true.²⁻³⁷

Another officer commented,

Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine Indian troops would be used in Europe against the Germans.²⁻³⁸

General Duff considered the two divisions he elected to send very good ones²⁻³⁹ and Hardinge boasted that their regiments were recruited from the best possible stock,

. . . [the] martial races of the North, who are far superior in fighting qualities to the Mahrattas and Deccanis.²⁻⁴⁰

But, as already noted, in each division, the troops were segregated by caste into companies or regiments. The price in military efficiency was high. Replacements could not be assigned where needed but had to go to those units which were confined to their caste. During the later fighting, some units whose castes were small in size or in which recruiting had fallen off remained always under strength, while others had more troops than they could use effectively.

Not only was the ability to replace casualties subject to difficulty, the size of an Indian battalion was far below that of a British battalion. The 18 Indian infantry battalions sailed to France with 764 officers and men,²⁻⁴¹ and this included a 10% average to replace expected losses. The equivalent British battalion had been brought up to about 1000 men. Further, to attain even this strength for each Indian battalion, the Indian Army had had to strip units remaining in India.²⁻⁴² By the time commanders had subtracted various

details, and supply, service, transport, and headquarters personnel were subtracted, an Indian battalion could seldom place more than 500 men actually in the trenches.²⁻⁴³ A British battalion could place at least 50% more.

The Indian Army had been neither trained nor equipped for European warfare. To some extent, since only three years had elapsed since the Committee of Imperial Defence had considered such use, this was excusable. But also true was the fact that Indian units were always one generation behind British units in weaponry. Before they could take their place in the line, they had to be completely reequipped. This took substantial time at Marseilles, where, upon disembarkation, new rifles, ammunition, machine guns, and maps had to be issued.²⁻⁴⁴ Nor were shortages restricted to the infantry. Sapper companies needed pumps, sandbags, and explosives.²⁻⁴⁵ Further, an Indian Division had half the number of guns allotted to a British division.²⁻⁴⁶ Army Headquarters in India added two field batteries to each departing division from Indian Army resources, and a heavy battery was added as each division arrived in France.²⁻⁴⁷ Again, all this took time. Other minor items also had to be provided, such as winter coats²⁻⁴⁸ and packs.²⁻⁴⁹

More important than supply and equipment shortages were the men who would lead the Indian divisions into combat. The better pay and opportunities for field service still drew many excellent young officers to India, but the British Army often used the Indian Army as a place where less capable British

officers could be put to pasture as a reward for long and faithful service.²⁻⁵⁰ And if the quality of senior officers was suspect, the quantity of junior officers was worse.

The field service strength of officers for an Indian battalion was only 12, excluding the medical officer. Thus the 18 Indian battalions sent to France needed a bit more than 200 British officers, but only 134 additional officers were available in India as replacements, including the full strength of the Indian Army Reserve Corps, 35 officers.²⁻⁵¹ Further, to exacerbate the situation, Lord Kitchener, now Secretary of State for War, had, over the strong protests of the Government of India, expropriated all 257 Indian Army officers on leave in Britain to train the large armies that he, alone of all his colleagues, knew would be required in France.²⁻⁵² Thus even before the Indian units were committed to combat, General Duff worried that replacing losses among his British officers would be his greatest difficulty.²⁻⁵³ Replacements, both officer and other ranks, could be drawn only from India where each battalion had a brother unit similar in caste composition with which it was "linked". Replacements for the battalion on active service were drawn first from this linked battalion whose men could be fitted into companies of the same caste and whose officers knew the language and customs of the men. By mid-October, 1914, Hardinge informed Crewe that the 10% per month officer replacements requested by the War Office would rapidly deplete the strength of the linked battalions in India,²⁻⁵⁴ but far from sympathizing with Hardinge's problems,

the War Office demanded not only the 10% per month but an immediate despatch of an additional 50%.²⁻⁵⁵

The selection of a Commander for the Indian Corps was an easier problem to solve. In 1913, Hardinge had recommended that General Sir James Willcocks be considered for the post of Commander-in-Chief in India, for Hardinge thought him "by far the best General in India."²⁻⁵⁶ Willcocks had had an excellent but by no means outstanding career. He had served in many colonial campaigns, commanded the West African Frontier Force, the Ashanti Field Force, and the Nowshera Brigade in India. The post however went to General Duff, ironically on the grounds that Duff was the better administrator. Nonetheless, Hardinge had not forgotten Willcocks and nominated him for the position of Commander of the Indian Corps.²⁻⁵⁷ Duff assented and Willcocks was appointed.²⁻⁵⁸

Arriving in France, Willcocks inspected those units which had already landed and reported to Kitchener on October 6th that:

. . . [the] condition, health, and spirit of Indian troops now in France is excellent, and all are eager for the war.²⁻⁵⁹

But only the shock of combat would really test the Indian infantry battalions, and that they would shortly receive.

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3. COMBAT

The movement of the Indians to the fighting front in France was delayed for several reasons. First, the cruise of the German raider, the Emden had caused late sailings of many of the troop transports. Second, in obedience to the Cabinet's original plan to use the Indian battalions in Egypt, many units had disembarked there and had to reboard ship for France. Finally, the time taken to reequip the Indian units for European warfare caused much delay. Fortunately, the immediate crisis which had caused the Cabinet to commit the Indian Army to France passed.

On August 30th, General von Moltke, Chief of the German General Staff, abandoned the hallowed Schlieffen Plan which called for the German armies to march nearly forty miles west of Paris before turning southeast to envelop the French capital. Instead, he sent his force wheeling nearly forty miles east of the city. But unknown to Moltke, Marshal Joffre, commanding the French forces, had formed a new army in Paris, and when the German armies marched past the city, he struck them in the flank. The resulting Battle of the Marne put an end to the German hope of a quick and easy victory. By the end of September, Moltke had been replaced and the German armies were in full retreat. The new German commander,

General Erich von Falkenhayn, did not despair. After stabilizing his front, he sent his forces to his right, towards the sea in an attempt to outflank and roll up the Allied left. Joffre saw the same opportunity to wrap up the German right. So began that series of side-steps, imperfectly executed by both sides, known as the Race to the Sea.

At Sir John French's request, Joffre had moved the BEF to the left of the Allied line where it was closer to its supply ports. In this position, it naturally played a major role in both halting the German moves to outflank the Allies, and in the Allied attempts to outflank the Germans. To do so, the need for additional forces was critical, and the Indian units were all that were immediately available. The crisis was brought on by both sides planning offensives in the same place. While both commanders planned offensives, von Falkenhayn was far more realistic. Two new German armies, one composed of troops set free by the fall of Antwerp and four newly raised corps, and another of troops shifted north from Lorraine, were to fall on the BEF. Field Marshal French, whose view of reality here first showed those signs of deficiency which would continue for his tenure of command, was at the same time planning an offensive of his own to advance over what he believed was a weak enemy cavalry screen. He could not have been more wrong. So was born the First Battle of Ypres.

Meanwhile, the Indian Divisions had completed mobilization, the Lahore Division arriving at Suez on September 13th,

and reembarking less the Sirhind Brigade on the 19th, finally reaching Marseilles on September 26th.³⁻¹ The French people greeted them with great enthusiasm. For the Indian soldiers, their first direct contact with a white indigenous population brought many surprises. For the first time they saw whites who were not only officials, soldiers, or men of industry and commerce, but were peasants, small shopkeepers, and poor workers as well. One Indian, quartered in a French home for a time wrote home:

There is a world of difference between the [white] women of India and the women of this country. . . . During the whole three months I never saw this old lady sitting idle, although she belonged to a high family. Indeed during the whole three months . . . of her own free will she washed my clothes, arranged my bed, and polished my boots. . . . She washed my bedroom daily with warm water. She used to prepare and give me a tray with bread, milk, butter, and coffee. I was continually wishing to find a way to reimburse her the expense. But however hard I pressed her, she declined. When we had to leave the village the old lady wept on my shoulder. Strange that I had never seen her weeping for her dead son and yet she should weep for me. Moreover at parting, she pressed on me a 5 franc note to meet my expenses en route.³⁻²

Well might General Willcocks write after the war:

What may eventually be the result of all the friendliness and "camaraderie" between the French and the Indians is hard to say. It will have its advantages; it will surely have its disadvantages. "East is East and West is West": the Ganges and the Seine flow in different directions; the artificial meeting of these waters may not be an unmixed blessing. The Hindu on his return to Kashi (Benares) or the Mahomedan at his prayers at the Juma Musjid at Delhi may think differently of the white races across the sea to what he thought before the transports bore him across the "kala-pani", the black water.³⁻³

While the issue of the relationship between Indian soldiers and white society would come up again, for the moment the destiny of the Indian Corps lay with the BEF. By the time some of the Indian battalions had debarked in Marseilles and been reequipped for European warfare, it was late October. Von Falkenhayn had launched his massive blow and the need for reinforcements at the front was desperate. By October 21st, the BEF moving forward in its own attack had run head on into the German offensive. Thrust immediately onto the defensive, they clung tenaciously to their trenches and called for help.

The pressing need for reinforcements meant that the Indian battalions were thrown in piecemeal, in brigade, battalion, and even half battalion strength, not as a unified command. In the south of the British sector, the British

position around Ypres depended on holding the ridge running from Mont des Cats to Wytschaete. This ridge dominated the terrain to the east and south, rising in places to several hundred feet. It had a maximum width of two miles and ran for eleven miles from Cassel east to Messines and Wytschaete and then north to Westroosebke. Defending the bend in the ridge from Mont Kemmel to Wytschaete was the Cavalry Corps under Lt-General Sir Edmund Allenby, 9,000 men facing the 24,000 of the German cavalry. On October 21st, elements of the Ferozepore Brigade of the Lahore Division were attached to the Cavalry Corps. A half battalion of the 57th Rifles was attached to the 4th Brigade of the 2nd Cavalry Division and the other half of the 57th to the 5th Brigade. Also, the 129th Baluchis were attached to the 2nd Cavalry Division. By October 23rd, the first Indian soldiers had occupied front line trenches and that evening, the 57th Rifles took the first Indian casualties of the war as they repulsed a small German attack. In that action, Sepoy Usman Khan won the first decoration awarded to an Indian soldier on the Western Front for refusing to leave his post after being wounded twice, finally being carried away after being hit a third time. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal.³⁻⁴

For the next several days, the 57th Rifles and the 129th Baluchis held their primitive trenches without incident, although rain, the low lying boggy terrain, and poor drainage made them increasingly uncomfortable, even dangerous, as rumors abounded of wounded men drowning as they attempted to

reach the rear for treatment. The cold wet climate must have had an awful impact on the Indians who were not used to anything like it.

On October 26th, after another night of rain, both battalions were ordered to attack as part of a 2nd Division operation. The attack began at 3 p. m. The 57th reached its objective taking only minor casualties but the 129th was not so fortunate, losing 62 men, among whom was Captain Hampe-Vincent, the first British officer of an Indian battalion killed in action.³⁻⁵

By October 28th, sufficient units of the Lahore Division had reached the vicinity of the front to permit its gradual reconstitution, and the Meerut Division had arrived from Egypt³⁻⁶ but the process was a slow one. For the next several days, battalions of the Lahore Division would continue to fight as attachments to British divisions. On October 30th, two companies of the 57th were hit hard by a German attack. One company did not receive the order to withdraw and lost half its men. The 129th was also heavily attacked and by mid-afternoon forced to retreat. Early next morning, the 57th was ejected from its trenches, and although they won them back the next day, things were not going well. In this action, the companies of the 57th involved lost every British officer. By the time the two battalions were withdrawn from the line and sent to rejoin the Lahore Division, the 57th had lost six of its twelve British officers, four of its seventeen Indian officers, and 290 of its 730 men killed, wounded, or missing.

Things were almost as bad in the 129th Baluchis. That battalion lost six British officers, five Indian officers, and 228 men.³⁻⁷

Further south, General Horrace Smith-Dorrien's IInd Corps held a line from Givenchy to the north where it linked up with the French cavalry of General Conneau. By October 24th, German pressure had compelled the commitment of the Jullundur Brigade of the Lahore Division. That evening the Germans struck the 15th Sikhs and drove them from their trenches. The Lahore Division commander, Lt-General H. B. B. Watkis ordered the commander of the 15th Sikhs to counter-attack.

I greatly regret to hear of the losses suffered by the 15th Sikhs. . . . What I must ask you to do is to impress upon that gallant regiment that they must hold their position to the last man. Tell them that they and the 34th Pioneers & 59th Rifles are tonight holding the most important point of the whole line held by our King's soldiers. On them depends the success of his army and tell them that I know right well they will do their duty tonight.³⁻⁸

Despite Watkis' exhortation, the counter-attack failed and a British battalion had to retake the lost trenches.³⁻⁹ The 15th Sikhs had lost over 200 men in less than 24 hours³⁻¹⁰ and losses among the other Indian units engaged were also heavy.³⁻¹¹

A bit further south, the 47th Sikhs, 9th Bhopals, and two companies of sappers and miners were thrown in in the effort to retain the village of Neuve Chapelle. Here too losses were high. By the beginning of November, the average strength of all the committed Indian battalions stood at less than 550 men, down over 200 from the 110% strength with which they had landed, and those units which had seen heavy fighting were far lower. The 58th Rifles had only 461 men present for duty, the 9th Bhopals 469, the 15th Sikhs 392, and the 47th Sikhs 385.³⁻¹² The 2/8th Gurkhas were so hard hit by a German assault on October 30th, losing over 600 men killed, wounded, or missing,³⁻¹³ including ten of their British officers,³⁻¹⁴ that they broke and straggled to the rear in confusion. By November 9th, the Jullundur Brigade reported less than 75% strength.³⁻¹⁵

British senior officers and officials were very satisfied with the fighting qualities that Indian soldiers had so far exhibited. The high losses, in any case no higher than those sustained by the British battalions of the Indian Corps, had not seemed to have any more effect on Indian battalions than on British units. Both had suffered heavy casualties but both seemed capable of continuing to fight. Regarding the Indians, on October 27th, Field Marshal French sent a message of congratulations to the Jullundur Brigade expressing his "warm appreciation of the manner in which the Eighth Indian Brigade has maintained its position during today's fighting."³⁻¹⁶ He was echoed by General Smith-Dorrien who praised the Brigade's

"splendid fighting powers."³⁻¹⁷ General Watkis concurred, adding his "high appreciation of the gallant manner" in which the 47th Sikhs, 15th Sikhs, 34th Pioneers, and 59th Rifles had held their line for three days.³⁻¹⁸ All reports on the actions of the Indian battalions glowed with enthusiasm. The men of the 1/39th Garwhals were reported to be "quite steady."³⁻¹⁹ Smith-Dorrien specifically commended the 47th Sikhs for its part in the attack on Neuve Chapelle on October 28th.³⁻²⁰ The War Diary of the Indian Expeditionary Force mentioned that the 15th Sikhs "were in good spirit and tone."³⁻²¹ Field Marshal French wrote to Kitchener that he was "very favorably impressed with them [the Indian Corps] and their commander."³⁻²²

Crewe and Hardinge seemed equally pleased. Crewe telegraphed Hardinge on October 29th:

I only know so far, and that indirectly, that actual fighting by Indian troops began last Saturday, and of their behavior I hear excellent accounts.³⁻²³

Later that same day, he provided more information.

This is a thrilling moment for us all, as Indian troops have been in action in Europe for the first time and history is being made. Many very skilled judges have been in a little doubt whether they would retain complete steadiness under the inferno of shell fire which has proved so trying to the morale of soldiers in all the armies. But they seem to have stood this test splendidly at the very beginning.³⁻²⁴

Hardinge was delighted at the news, responding on November 9th:

All seems to be going well in India but the present moment is extremely critical, and I think that, if I can engage the pride and sympathy of India by stories of her troops at the front, the disloyal elements out here will find themselves at a discount, and the risk we are running by denuding India of troops will be minimized.³⁻²⁵

Crewe obligingly supplied more information.

We now begin to hear details about the Indian troops in Europe. The Lahore Brigade [sic] seems to have been subjected to a very severe and not quite fair treatment because it was necessary to abandon the intended method of putting the whole Indian Army Corps into the line together, as the fighting was severe and the pressure for more troops great: and the Brigade being the first up was used at once and as it could be. The Sikhs are said to have stood the appalling shell-fire wonderfully well, quite as well as British units that have not faced it before. The Gurkhas less well, and they would not remain in their trenches at one time; but I fancy this does not represent what may be expected of these troops as a class, as there were recruits in this particular battalion . . . to a rather unusual extent.³⁻²⁶

All the higher commanders, civilian and military, may have been satisfied, but among officers closer to the troops, there grew an increasing sense of unease as the heavy casualties, the wet cold weather, and the numbing blows of modern war affected the Indians. On November 8th, General Watkis reluctantly reported to the Headquarters of the Indian Corps that Brigadier General Egerton, commanding the Ferozepore Brigade, had requested that the 9th Bhopals be relieved as soon as possible. Hesitant to admit that one of his beloved Indian regiments might be reaching the limits of its endurance, Watkis insisted that the unit was sound.³⁻²⁷ But a far more ominous indicator of crumbling morale than a single brigade commander's judgment about one battalion appeared. Evidence began to mount that men of many different battalions and "martial races" were shooting themselves in order to be taken out of the line.

The first sign of such action was when medical officers noted the high incidence of wounds in the left hand. One noted in his diary:

The Indians have been doing some fighting and have lost a good many, mainly apparently from exposing themselves in badly made trenches. . . . We saw about 300 today, most of them wounds in the left hand. They were very gloomy; one of them at least was in tears because he had not killed a German.³⁻²⁸

The first reaction to the problem was to assume that the wounds had indeed been caused by enemy action, and an

order was drafted by the Division Staff on October 29th that:

Owing to large number of casualties due to wounds in the left hand men were warned not to needlessly expose their hands when firing from trenches. 3-29

By November 1st, two days later, the knowledge that the wounds were self-inflicted had penetrated the minds of senior staff. Messages were sent to subordinate units that:

It has been ascertained that without any doubt many of the wounds received by indian soldiers have been self inflicted. You will immediately taken [sic] steps to let it be known tonight to all the trenches that any indian soldier reported by the medical officer as having a self inflicted wound will be tried by court-martial and shot. 3-30

General Watkis found it necessary to tell his brigade commanders:

Medical officers have reported that many of the wounds in the hands that have been received have been self-inflicted. General Watkis finds this hard to believe of his brave Indian soldiers but if there are any who are so cowardly he warns them that the penalty for cowardice is death. This is to be communicated tonight to all Indian troops under your command, not to British troops. 3-31

The Meerut Division commander, Lt-General C. A. Anderson, followed precautionary measures, ordering brigade commanders and medical officers to record and report all suspected self-inflicted wounds.³⁻³² Courts-martial were also convened and several men tried.³⁻³³

The problem was so serious that a study of it was ordered. On November 9th, this inquiry determined that of the 1,848 Indian soldiers admitted to hospital through November 3rd, 1,049, or 57% had hand wounds.³⁻³⁴ Indeed, over half the hand wounds suffered by Indian soldiers in over a year of combat were inflicted in the first two weeks. Nor were the wounds inflicted at random, for certain battalions, particularly those that had borne the first shock of combat had received far more than their share. The following chart gives some indication of the problem.

Statement Showing Numbers of Hand Wounds (i. e. Wounds Below Elbow Joint) Admitted into Field Ambulances of Lahore Division from the Beginning of Campaign to 14th August 1915.³⁻³⁵

<u>Indian Battalions</u>		<u>British Battalions</u>	
47th Sikhs	479	Connaught Rangers	54
129th Baluchis	318	1st Manchesters	38
15th Sikhs	236	1st Highland Light	
57th Rifles	194	Infantry	25
59th Rifles	182	1/4th Liverpools	15
40th Pathans	135	1/4th Suffolks	5
34th Pioneers	134	1/4th Londons	3
1/1st Gurkhas	50		
1/4th Gurkhas	40		
89th Punjabis	40		

Although the high incidence of self-inflicted wounds soon dropped off as a result of firm action by the British, that it should even have occurred showed that the British view of the

Indian soldier as totally obedient, loyal, and devoted was seriously out of touch with reality. But not even this fact deterred long held ideas. Less than two weeks after the problem surfaced, an officer of the 129th Baluchis, which had the 2nd highest number of hand wounds in the Lahore Division could maintain that "The spirit of the men is simply wonderful. . . ."3-36

Racism provided a convenient explanation as to why the Indian soldier had proved less effective than his white comrade. On November 12th, Field Marshal Lord Roberts, during a visit to Willcocks, warned him about the inherent limits of Indian soldiers.

No one has a higher regard for them than I have; but they have their limits. Up to that they will do anything and face anyone, beyond it they cannot go. . . . With British officers they fight splendidly; without them they will not do much. 3-37

For some reason, this dangerous breakdown in morale made no impression on those outside the Indian Corps. On November 15th, Field Marshal French wired Hardinge that:

Indian troops under Willcocks are reported to be fit and standing campaign well. . . . I am well satisfied with behavior of Indian troops showing good fighting spirit. 3-38

Certainly Crewe had no knowledge of what was happening. He telegraphed Hardinge that:

All classes have shown great aptitude for new kind of warfare. Despite inevitable hardships no complaints. Average health of Indians even better than of English; morale splendid.³⁻³⁹

We can only speculate as to the reason for their ignorance. First, the senior officers of the Indian Corps who knew of the problem had given their lives to the Indian Army. They must have been reluctant to admit to themselves and certainly to others that the instrument which they had themselves built was faulty. Second, if they had admitted that, might not they have been personally blamed and their careers damaged? It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the information regarding self-inflicted wounds was not passed up the chain of command.

Even if the morale problem could be solved, if the Corps was to be maintained in the field, somehow the Government of India would have to find replacements for the heavy losses the Indian battalions were taking, and the Indian Army's mechanisms for that were already under severe pressure. Even before the Indian battalions had taken their first losses, Crewe, Hardinge, and Duff were all aware that sufficient replacements would be hard to find. Crewe wrote Hardinge on October 22nd that:

What is rather disturbing, though, is the question of reliefs. Casualties are desperately heavy in this war. . . . So I don't wonder at your being

aghast at the possible depletion without the means of filling the gaps.³⁻⁴⁰

By mid-November, Hardinge believed he had come to the limits of his ability to find replacements.

We have come however, to the bedrock of our resources in the way of troops and particularly of officers, and we have immense difficulties before us in filling up the wastage. I notice that some of the Indian regiments have suffered very severely, one of them losing half its whole strength and another a third of its strength. I see no harm in this, but it is difficult to fill the gaps. . . .³⁻⁴¹

Basically, Hardinge operated under three constraints. The first two, as already mentioned, were the small size of the recruiting base which was but a tiny fraction of the population of India, and the limitations of the "linked battalion" method. The third was that the Indian Army Reserve was both small in size and deficient in quality. The Reserve had been established in 1885 with a paper strength of 23,000 men.³⁻⁴² The theory behind it was that men who joined the Indian Army but later decided to return to civilian life would pass into the Reserve. But the Indian Army was a long service army in which men generally joined for life, or left completely when their enlistment was up if they found military life not to their liking. Also, as in most regular armies, the professionals had little faith in the ability of the reserve forces,

so when training funds were allotted, the reserves received precious little. Whatever the reason, the Reservists sent to France, the pick of those called up, were useless. An officer assigned to the Base Depot at Marseilles commented on them:

The Reservists were the most disappointing.

Many too old, many consistently half-starved since their last training two years before, I was surprised at the number of very bad teeth. There were some Sikhs who were perfectly useless unless they doped themselves with opium. . . . Another aspect in which some of the Reservists failed was that their Esprit de Corps had worn rather threadbare.³⁻⁴³

Out of the almost 1,600 older reservists sent to France, less than a third were fit for service.³⁻⁴⁴ Willcocks had nothing good to say about the system.

The terms of service which passed men into the Reserve after a short period in the ranks . . . created a Reserve which was not only useless but a positive danger in wartime. The Reservists sent to the Indian Corps in France were of this type, largely worn out, hating the very idea of war, many physically unfit and incapable of a single day's work.³⁻⁴⁵

In short, the Indian Army Reserve was a complete failure.

Thus, after only a few weeks of combat, the entire system on which the Indian battalions depended showed severe deficiencies. Losses were rapidly climbing to the point where sufficient replacements would be difficult to find. Morale

seemed to be crumbling. If the Indian Corps was to fight on, these and other problems would have to be quickly dealt with, but could an officer corps nurtured in the traditions of colonial wars and wearing the mental blinders of racism make the necessary changes?

3. FOOTNOTES

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3-3 Willcocks, With the Indians in France, p. 23.

3-4 Merewether and Smith, pp. 21-4.

3-5 Merewether and Smith, pp. 25-8.

3-6 S.T. 910, French to Kitchener, 27 October 1914, WO 33/713.

3-7 Merewether and Smith, pp. 30-9.

3-8 Message, G. O. C. Lahore Division to G. O. C. 8th Indian Brigade, 25 October 1914, Appendix I(38), Appendixes I, II, III, Lahore Division G.(eneral) S.(taff), October 1914, WO 95/3911.

3-9 Merewether and Smith, pp. 44-9.

3-10 Message, G. O. C. Lahore Division to G. O. C. 8th Indian Brigade, 25 October 1914, Appendix I(38), Appendixes I, II, III, Lahore Division G. S., October 1914, WO 95/3911.

3-11 Merewether and Smith, pp. 44-9.

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3-21¹¹War Diary, I. E. F., October, 1914, entry for 28 October 1914, WO 95/1088.

3-22¹²S. T. 916, French to Kitchener, 28 October 1914, WO 33/713.

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4. FESTUBERT AND GIVENCHY

As the war proceeded into its fourth month the beginnings of what came to be known as trench warfare were observable everywhere along the front. Now, over sixty years later, those of us who look back can have only a dim understanding of life in the trenches. On the Indian Corps front, conditions were among the worst along the entire line. South of Ypres, water is found everywhere just beneath the surface and the line, rather than being one of trenches dug into the earth, was often sandbags placed along the top. Here also, the Germans commanded the high ground and in order to get close to the higher, drier ground, the British drove their trenches to within yards of the German's.⁴⁻¹ Anyone who had the misfortune to serve in this area knew of the

miserable conditions. To start with, the front-line area was flooded and the communication trenches vanished under water. There was no front line trench. Instead, earthworks, constructed of sandbags piled on top of the original parapit, had been made.⁴⁻²

To live, sleep, eat, and die in the mud and muck is an experience that only those who were actually there can truly comprehend.

We had a march of 3 miles over shelled road then nearly 3 along a flooded trench. After that we came

to where the trenches had been blown flat out and had to go over the top. It was of course dark, too dark, and the ground was not mud, not sloppy mud, but an octopus of sucking clay, 3, 4, and 5 feet deep, relieved only by craters full of water. Men have been known to drown in them. Many stuck in the mud and only got on by leaving their waders, equipment, and in some cases their clothes.⁴⁻³

The front line soldier, British or Indian, was concerned only with the ground a hundred yards or so to either side of him, and the German trenches to his front across the area of "no man's land." His day began with the morning "stand-to", the period of maximum danger when any attacker from the East, could through the early dawn, see far enough in front of him to keep his direction but was hidden from the defender by the half light until too close to shoot. Front trenches were manned, intermittent rifle and machine gun fire sputtered out, and then, finally, at full daylight, the men stood down, leaving only sentries to watch for the enemy. Then came breakfast and the endless details necessary to keep the water soaked sandbags and ground in some state of defense, to carry rations from the rear forward, and to do all the other mundane tasks which have occupied soldiers from Caesar's legionary to the "grunt" of Vietnam.

During the days between major enemy or friendly operations, death came rarely, but always suddenly, from the

sniper's bullet or from a high explosive shell.⁴⁻⁴ That men should have stood this hideous existence for years, or until death took them is something we can only wonder at, and that the Indian soldier, having no direct stake in the conflict took any of it is all the more remarkable.

But take it they did, and it was the mission of those commanding them to assure that they continued to do so. In this, the middle of November, those commanding the Indian infantry had three pressing problems with which to deal; rebuilding their battalions into efficient fighting units, replacing lost British officers, and assuring an adequate supply of Indian replacements.

The most immediate problem was that of morale and efficiency. The incidence of self-inflicted wounds had rapidly decreased due to the threat of courts-martial and the death penalty, but while that may have treated this symptom of poor morale, it did little to treat the cause, about which the British were still mystified. After all, even if Indians were not expected to exhibit equal qualities to white soldiers, they were members of the "martial races". As a start, the Indian divisions, now organized and committed as the Indian Corps, were given responsibility for the extreme south of the British line. This was a sector of no great importance, but it did afford the opportunity to accustom both officers and men to the novelty of trench warfare without the danger of extreme losses.

Operations in the trenches during times in which there were no major attacks were limited to raids, sporadic shelling, and the endless details. The raid, a tactical operation that continued throughout the war, had various purposes; to take prisoners for interrogation, eliminate enemy machine guns and strong points, to destroy enemy trenches too close to the British line from which snipers and grenade throwers could menace the troops, and, most important to the staffs who did not have to bear the casualties, to keep up the fighting spirit of the troops.

Raids, such as the one launched by the 2/9th Gurkhas and the 2/39th Garwhalis, could be costly. On November 13th, six platoons of the Gurkhas and fifty men of the Garwhalis, followed by two platoons of Sappers and Miners, attempted a night raid on a forward German trench in order to destroy it. The raid began at 9:00 p. m. with a fifteen minute artillery preparation on the main German support trenches. Although the soldiers were supposed to advance in silence, men began cheering as they moved toward their objective. Alerted by that and by the artillery preparation, the Germans opened a withering fire which killed or wounded all the British and Indian officers in the center and on the left of the force, with one exception. With the loss of their officers, that wing of the attack halted. Some of the men reached the German trench and engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy, but although they held this small portion of their objective, reinforcements could not be brought forward through the German

fire. As they came under fire from German artillery, the advanced elements withdrew. Losses exceeded 100 men and the enemy trench was not destroyed.

Two days later, another raid of 125 men of the 6th Jat Infantry, led by four British officers attempted to clear another enemy trench. They reached it, cleared it with the bayonet, and retreated, a little over an hour after the beginning of the attack. Casualties during the retreat were heavy.⁴⁻⁵ Nonetheless, the men had fought well in both of these raids and their morale seemed to have been restored.

As to coping with the novel conditions of trench war, the Indian soldiers took the lead in the manufacture and use of trench mortars, grenades, periscopes, and other items which were unavailable from normal supply channels this early in the war.⁴⁻⁶ Perhaps decades of insufficient funding by the Government of India had had the effect of teaching Indian units the virtues of makeshifts.

By the end of November, it looked to the British that the Indians had overcome their initial shock and were now as good as they ought to be, but a more serious test of their fighting ability came on November 24th when, in the area of Festubert, the Corps was hit by a strong local attack. Fortunately for the Germans, they struck just at the time the Lahore Division was relieving the Meerut, and the command lines were confused. The Germans preceded their attack with a heavy artillery bombardment and the Indians, who had not yet learned to leave their forward trenches lightly manned, and

whose officers had not yet come to distinguish between courage and bravado, exposing themselves and their men needlessly, lost many men.⁴⁻⁷

Then the German infantry attacked, driving several Indian units from their trenches and inflicting heavy losses on some, the 6th Jats taking over 150 casualties, their total strength falling below 300 men.⁴⁻⁸ The 58th Rifles, ordered to retake the lost trenches, hesitated to charge, moving forward only when four British soldiers joined the Major in leading the attack.⁴⁻⁹ In this small but significant action, we can see the emerging pattern of Indian service on the Western Front. As long as the front was quiet, the men would stand the normal rigors of trench warfare, even participating enthusiastically in offensive operations such as raids, or even major attacks, provided heavy casualties did not occur or seem likely. But if high losses were the case, or if the Indians were hit unprepared, they were unreliable. Some of this filtered back to higher headquarters, for when General Haig visited Indian Corps Headquarters on November 29th, he found "an air of dejection and despondancy."⁴⁻¹⁰

Yet the news from the fighting front to India breathed optimism. Crewe telegraphed Hardinge on November 30th that Field Marshal French had been "much impressed by their initiative and resource."⁴⁻¹¹ And Willcocks wrote Hardinge on December 5th that the men were doing well. However, he requested that the proportion of British to Indian troops in

his divisions be increased from 1:3 to 1:1.⁴⁻¹² Surely this indicated a basic unease as to the Indian's fighting ability.

The reason for the continuing flow of good news from the fighting front to India when the true situation looked far less sanguine may have lain in the natural tendency for subordinates to tell their superiors what they wish to hear, and in this case, Hardinge's desires were explicit. On November 9th he cabled Willcocks,

I have strongly impressed upon Lord Crewe the very great importance of maintaining the enthusiasm which undoubtedly exists in this country over the presence of Indian troops in Europe. . . . So long as we appeal to Indian pride and sentiment there need be no fear of trouble in the country and a little knowledge of the part our Indian troops are taking in the battle . . . would help to soften the effect of the heavy lists of Indian casualties that are now beginning to pour in.⁴⁻¹³

He reiterated his point two weeks later, writing to Crewe, If when announcing casualties among Indian troops . . . we could publish connected news . . . of good behavior of troops generally and of particular as well as gallant conduct of individuals simultaneously with announcement of heavy casualty lists (it) would considerably lighten depressing effect of latter on Indian public.⁴⁻¹⁴

Another opportunity shortly presented itself to test the fighting qualities of the Indians. Field Marshal French's request for a shift of the BEF to the extreme left of the allied line and a subsequent advance up the coast had been denied by the Cabinet for a variety of reasons. Instead he was directed to attack in support of a French effort further south. Accordingly, on December 14th, the BEF moved forward.⁴⁻¹⁵ Sir John relegated the Indian Corps to a supporting role. They were to launch local raids and attacks to tie down the enemy forces facing them and thus prohibit their movement to the point of the main British effort. On the 16th, the Ferozepore Brigade, some of whose units had been ejected from their trenches the previous month, staged an unsuccessful raid.

The idea again was to seize enemy trenches. The initial assault carried the advance enemy trenches and almost reached the main trench, but it proved impossible to bring up support through the enemy fire, and a communication trench could not be completed before dark. By dark, the communication trench was only twelve yards short, but it proved impossible to finish. The Indians in the forward enemy trench tried to reach it to withdraw, but they were all killed. On the other side of the advanced position, a communication trench did get through and the men managed to retreat. The principle assault unit in this raid, the 129th Baluchis, lost over 120 men.⁴⁻¹⁶ That evening, at the conclusion of the raid, one of their officers, Lieutenant H. V. Lewis, wrote home that "The spirit

of the men is still excellent and we are not really downhearted." ⁴⁻¹⁷ Given their action a few days later, he could not have been more wrong.

On December 19th, in obedience to Field Marshal French's orders, units of the Indian Corps staged their holding attacks. The next day the Germans counter-attacked the Lahore Division. At 0900, a series of mines exploded under the Sirhind Brigade, wiping out half a company of the Highland Light Infantry and a full double-company of the 1/4th Gurkhas. An infantry assault immediately followed, ⁴⁻¹⁸ and the Indian regiments broke.

The first to go was the already battered 129th Baluchis. One witness reported,

I was proceeding there when I met about 300 men of different regiments, mostly 129th Baluchis, who were returning from Givenchy. Many of them had thrown away their rifles and they said that all their officers had been killed. ⁴⁻¹⁹

The Commander of the 129th, Lt-Colonel W. M. Southey put it this way,

. . . my orderly came in and said "our men are retiring . . . we tried to get the Sikhs and our men into position. But . . . as fast as they were put in one side they went off in the other. . . . I couldn't understand how so little resistance was made but the men were worn out. . . . I can only surmise that the constant strain had been too much and that once the Indian gets nervous he is useless. Up to this the

regiment has done well and I had no idea such a thing could occur, but I would like G. O. C. to understand that a lot of the men now with us are reservists of a poor type, and their influence on the younger soldier would have a bad effect.⁴⁻²⁰

Another officer blamed the muddy ground.

. . . the enemy left their trenches and advanced with fixed bayonets in great masses . . . owing to the nature of the trench and the liquid mass of mud round the loopholes the rifles jammed in large numbers and the onward rush of the Germans could not be arrested. The fact of the rifles jamming seemed to cause panic amongst the men and they started to retire and nothing could stop them. At the support trenches about 20 yards in rear of the fire trench I stopped about 20 men of the company but found only 4 or 5 of these men were firing. I then realized that some of the men had no rifles and can only account for it that they threw away their rifles in panic. . . . I can only account for the panic owing to the strained nerves of the men . . . on the 16th [they] carried out with great pluck and determination an attack. . . . The last four days they had been working under constant strain and practically no sleep. . . . The Company had lost half its members in the last six days.⁴⁻²¹

The panic of the 129th quickly affected other units on their flanks. The 1/4th Gurkhas, shocked by their losses from the enemy mines, also retreated as did the 9th Bhopals.

. . . several single men and parties of 4 and 5 of the 9th Bhopal Infantry and of the 4th Gurkhas came down the road. . . . All these men were armed and seemed calm, and although I wondered how the Gurkhas had got there, I did not suspect anything like a break. . . . From this time the number of 9th Bhopal Infantry men coming down the trench increased greatly, and at times the trench was completely blocked. . . . I was immediately met by a large number of 129th men. . . . I tried to rally them but they were out of hand . . . 129th men and Gurkhas - many of them unarmed were retiring from all directions. . . . At this moment a further large number of 129th men and Gurkhas came back in a crowd - I could not count them or find any officer or Indian officer. They were not running but were walking in disorder. . . . I heard them calling to my men to get out of the way - to retire - not to block the trench - to leave their rifles. . . . I warned them and fired four shots from my revolver into a crowd of them. . . . I consider that . . . 500 or 600 men of the 129th and Gurkhas passed me. ⁴⁻²²

All who observed the retreat agreed that "The men were without officers and seemed to be quite out of control." ⁴⁻²³

By the end of the day, the Germans held the trenches of the Sirhind Brigade, sections of the Ferozepore Brigade's front, and the village of Givenchy.⁴⁻²⁴ Counter-attacks launched the next day, reinforced by dismounted cavalry and the division reserve were unsuccessful.⁴⁻²⁵ Willcocks reported that his troops were tired out and unable to fight anymore, and would have to be relieved at once or the consequences might be disastrous.⁴⁻²⁶ Lt-General Anderson, later to succeed Willcocks in command of the Indian Corps, now commanding the Meerut Division, reported that some of his men would not stay in their trenches any longer, although they managed to hold on for another week.⁴⁻²⁷ Haig, faced with the possibility of disaster, had no choice, and ordered the Ist Corps to relieve the Indians. Its units retook all the trenches the Indians had lost.⁴⁻²⁸

In the days that followed the battle, all searched for the reasons for the failure of the Indians. Field Marshal French laid part of the blame on the G. O. C. of the Lahore Division, General Watkis, for failing to insure adequate support and ordering the troops to attack over much open ground. He thought the Indian troops exhausted at the beginning of the attack, and, like many officers, felt that the effect of cold upon Indians was greater than upon British troops, although health statistics did not bear that out.⁴⁻²⁹ In any case, he insisted, over Willcocks' objections, that General Watkis be relieved.

Willcocks himself laid great stress on the supposed fact that the Indians had been hit by crack German troops, and in the Indian's natural inferiority.⁴⁻³⁰ But the appraisal which showed how the ideology of paternalistic racism colored the minds of the British is best shown in the statement by Brigadier General Charteris, Haig's Chief of Intelligence, who wrote on December 22nd,

I am afraid there will be a lot of hard words about the Indians. There should not be. They are not, of course, as good or nearly as good as British troops. How could they be? If they were we could not have held India with the small force we have there. This kind of fighting is quite new to them. They have not been trained for it. They have quite rightly a high respect for the "white man" and the German is to them a "white man." Besides this, they have no personal interest in the quarrel. But most of all Indian troops cannot fight without white officers whom they know.⁴⁻³¹

Over and over, those who came into contact with Indian soldiers reiterated the essential role of the white officer, and those officers were in increasingly short supply. By the end of 1914, the average Indian battalion had only eight, and the hardest hit units were down to four or five. This meant that, after subtracting the Commander, the Adjutant, and the Quartermaster, the number of officers actually in the trenches

with the Indian soldiers could be one or two at best. The Commander of the 9th Bhopals wrote, when the actual strength of his British officers was six, "I have three British officers only for trench duty which means that they practically never get any sleep . . . natives without British officers do not stand it like Britishers."4-32

The shortage of white officers had been foreseen almost as soon as the first casualty lists began to come in from Europe. On October 25th, Willcocks telegraphed Hardinge, Question of officers for Indian Corps is very important. These Corps mostly up to strength at present, but will very soon need many officers to replace casualties. I strongly recommend that all officers belonging to units now with this army corps and still detailed in India be called for immediately. If India intends that casualties here should be replaced from officers of Indian Army now detailed in England, it will never do, as these are for other urgent duties, and will also be necessary to fill many vacancies later on.4-33

Hardinge replied that "I fear we shall experience great difficulty in supplying wastage of officers, for, as you know, we have literally no source to draw from them."4-34 The War Office was not helpful, refusing to release Indian Army officers employed in England in training the New Armies.4-35

The Government of India tried various expedients. Hardinge asked Crewe to send back to India those officers too

sick or wounded to serve at the front but able to perform garrison duties. These could relieve officers there for service in France.⁴⁻³⁶ Crewe asked that 15% of the wartime increase of 300 Sandhurst openings be reserved for the Indian Army, and if the War Office would not agree to that, he requested authority to train them in India.⁴⁻³⁷ The basic problem however remained, to take a Britain and accustom him to the subtleties of dealing with a foreign civilization, not to mention teaching him a foreign language, took time and that they did not have. There were two sources upon which the authorities might draw immediately, British civilians living in India and members of the Indian Civil Service. Hardinge quickly tapped the supply of civilians, recruiting 300 by the end of November, and expected that they would be sufficient to meet the needs of the Army for six or seven months, once they could be trained. After that, the supply of suitable civilians in India would be exhausted, except for members of the ICS.⁴⁻³⁸

The men of the ICS would make ideal officer candidates for Indian units. These men, few in number, carefully selected, highly trained, and language qualified, carried the enormous responsibility of administering India for the Raj. If India was stripped of these men, the Government would then be in the hands of their Indian subordinates and of those too old to join the Army. The very thought gave nightmares to the India Office. As early as October, Crewe limited the number of ICS officers permitted to join the Indian Army, and

instructed Hardinge that they should not be posted to units likely to go overseas or encouraged to expect active service abroad.⁴⁻³⁹ Hardinge objected, wiring Crewe that,

We think it most unlikely that men will volunteer in any number, if it is definitely to be laid down that employment of civil officers will not extend beyond India. If we are to be debarred from this source of supply, and if Your Lordship is unable to acquiesce in such expedients as seem to us to be required, we can only say that we fear we shall be entirely unable to supply wastage of officers with Indian troops in France with consequent progressive failure of efficiency.⁴⁻⁴⁰

Crewe would have none of it. The

. . . primary obligation of officers of the civil services of India is to serve in India, or, if on leave, to hold themselves in readiness to return to duty if and when required. To permit volunteering on a large scale for military service extending over an indefinitely long period and to grant leave freely for the purpose, would embarrass the civil administration.⁴⁻⁴¹

But Hardinge again reiterated his unanswerable argument,

. . . if we are to be debarred from what we consider necessary to supply wastage among officers with Indian troops, we feel monstrous state of affairs will be the result.⁴⁻⁴²

Crewe eventually relented, and ICS members served with the Indian Army overseas.

In the meantime, at the front, Willcocks and his division commanders attempted to curb the "follow me" approach to leadership which they had taught their junior officers during peacetime.

The Army Corps Commander wishes it to be clearly understood that except when taking part in a general action, or in an emergency or to save a situation, British Officers are not to be employed in numbers out of their proper proportion to the other ranks.

If an operation cannot be carried out without exceeding this proportion it must be abandoned.⁴⁻⁴³

He also directed specific instructions to battalion commanders who had shown a distressing tendency to take a personal part in minor tactical operations.

The Corps Commander desires Brigade Commanders to impress on officers Commanding battalions in the defensive line that their headquarters should not be in the trenches, and that it is the duty of the company commanders and not the Commanding officer or his Adjutant to take part in small local counter-attacks. . . . Casualties at the headquarters of a unit caused by exposure not imperatively demanded by the tactical situation may it must be remembered needlessly hamper the efficiency of a unit.⁴⁻⁴⁴

It is therefore incumbent on G. O. S. C. and unit commanders to use every endeavor in the future to conserve their British officers.

In future, on no occasion of ordinary fighting is, in an Indian unit, a single British officer, over the proportion (e. g. in Infantry 1 B. O. to 60 men) to be detailed for fighting purposes.

It has been notified by G. H. Q. that in future only the proportion of 1 officer to 60 casualties will be replaced. 4-45

The days of bravado, probably over anyway for those officers still alive, were now officially terminated.

But why were the British officers so important? Why was the belief so widespread that Indian soldiers would fight well only when led by white officers? To examine what the average British officer wrote on the subject is to wade through masses of what in the age of the social sciences can only be described as romanticism. Yet to dismiss these statements out of hand would be an enormous error. First, the Officer Corps believed it as a matter of faith and what men believe affects their actions. This belief was one of the major premises on which the Indian Army was built. Second, without British officers the fighting capacity of an Indian battalion rapidly deteriorated, even if Indian officers remained or were replaced from the ranks. The white officer was essential. The following comment is typical and accurate.

They are of course splendid fighters, but are very lost without their officers. Personally, I think they have too few officers; the other day I had to rally the relics of two companies of Wildes Rifles, whose officers had all been shot. . . . They were splendid in the trenches as long as their officers were there but afterwards did not know what to do.⁴⁻⁴⁶

If the bond between the white officer and Indian soldier was not quite what the white officer believed, it was nonetheless something special, and both sides of the relationship, British and Indian, considered it so. We have little if any data about what the Indian soldier thought of his white officer except what has been written by the British, and that is so biased that it is suspect. Yet certain anecdotes stand out; the British officer who, on patrol on a rainy night, slept in the open, wakening in the morning to discover that he had been covered by the blankets of his men, they then sleeping exposed to the wet cold rain, and when protesting, receiving the answer, "But Sahib, you are our Sahib and it is right that we take care of you." Phillip Mason, an ex-officer of the ICS put the Indian soldier's attitude this way, "I am your man; I will serve you in any way you command and you will protect me against everyone else."⁴⁻⁴⁷ As we have seen however, when the British officer was absent, the Indian soldier often failed to fight, or at least fight well. For this, the British officer had an easy explanation in racism. Today of

course, our task is harder, for in the light of current knowledge such an explanation is unacceptable. The problem nonetheless remains. Without British officers, and more particularly his British officers, the Indian soldier did not fight well.

Why this was so is difficult to understand. The casualty rate among British officers in British battalions was as high as in Indian battalions, yet those battalions did not experience a radical degradation of fighting efficiency. Why were British Non-Commissioned Officers able to step into the shoes of lost British officers while Indian equivalents, and Indian Commissioned Officers could not? No complete solution to this problem is at hand, but it may be possible to at least partially explain it.

Each party saw the bond in the light of their respective civilizations.⁴⁻⁴⁸ The British model was the romanticized relationship between country squire and faithful retainer. The Indian saw it through the requirements of caste "dharma" or duty. To make the problem even more complex, laid over these two was the cross-cultural bond of friendship which may or may not have existed between an individual officer and his particular men.

The high importance which the Indian soldier placed upon his personal relationship with his British officer is easily understandable from the viewpoint of a pre-industrial society in which most relationships are multiplex. In such a society, individuals assume a wide variety of roles vis-a-vis each

other. For example, in a pre-industrial society, it is normal for a son to follow a father into the economic structure. Thus Father, while remaining Father, also becomes Employer, and Teacher of his skills. This one individual performs three distinct functions as we in the West define them. In contrast, in our society, most sons do not follow their fathers into business, and furthermore they are trained by individuals specifically charged with that purpose. Thus the son's employer will not be his father, and neither will his teacher.

Coming from such a society in which multiplex relationships were the rule, the Indian soldier would have considered it normal for his British officer to assume a variety of roles. Indeed, he would have considered it strange had the British officer restricted himself solely to military functions. So the British officer often became a combination of military leader, teacher, father substitute, and general advisor to the Indian soldier. As such, the Indian soldier's relationship was with the man inside the uniform, not with the uniform itself. Of course, the dividing line was not concrete. Like all soldiers in all armies, he had to salute anyone wearing the uniform, but the phrase typifying the western army, "you salute the uniform, not the man in it" was essentially foreign to the Indian's outlook.

From all accounts, the British officers were well aware of the importance of this personal bond, but they were unable completely to ignore their own pre-conditioning. They never fully realized what enormous impact the loss of these known

and trusted men would have on their units, persisting in the belief that if only enough white men of proper background could be found, the problem could be solved. When this man appeared, acting as his predecessor had done in skill and courage, they could not understand how profoundly the relationship had changed, for when the personal relationship disappeared with the loss of both officers and men who had known each other for years, both sides could now conceive of the relationship only in terms of their own cultural models, and those models were very different.

The model the British Indian Army officer used is easy for us to understand as we are the products of much the same culture. He was drawn from the world of the middle classes and the public schools, with their emphasis on games, teamwork, and personal initiative. All his life he had related to his fellows in terms of mutual dependence, a horizontal relationship in which his actions were expected to elicit equivalent action from those to whom he related. He approached the Indian soldier the same way. If he, the British officer showed courage and initiative, and was willing to suffer the burdens of trench warfare, he felt instinctively that the Indian soldier ought to do the same. When he did not, the white officer put the failure down to the Indian's supposed racial inferiority.

There is of course, another explanation. To begin with, Indian society is hierarchically ordered, each strata or caste having its own rights and obligations. The action of a member

of one caste to a member of another does not necessarily call for an equivalent response. The essence is that a man must be true to the "dharma" or duty of his own caste, not to the person acting upon him. This concept is one of unilateral dependence. In relationships of this kind, such as between parent and child for example, the parent has duties toward the child, such as feeding him, for which the child is not expected to undertake any form of repayment.

Such might have been the relationship between the white officer and the Indian soldier as the Indian saw it. He expected the white officer to exhibit extreme courage, initiative, and competence since this was the dharma of the white officer's caste. However, this did not imply that the Indian soldier had to respond in kind. Indeed, the paternalistic attitudes of the officers implicitly indicated that he was not expected to do so.

Certainly, the Indian soldier, drawn from castes having their own martial traditions, was compelled by his dharma to soldierly virtue, which the all encompassing life of the regiment did its best to reinforce. The exhibition of these virtues was however conditioned on the expectation of short colonial campaigns in which light casualties were the rule. Further, his own martial tradition was pre-modern in which individual honor, the "izzat" of which British officers were so fond of talking, came from face-to-face combat with an ill-armed individual enemy. Thus when confronted with trench warfare and its attendant horrors, an enemy armed at least as

well as himself, the high probability of an impersonal death, and deprived of the leadership of the British officer he knew, we ought not be surprised that he proved less willing than his European counterpart in bearing the terrors of modern war.

He was quick to try ways out of the situation, all of which have been used by soldiers throughout history. As mentioned previously, he sometimes shot himself. He feigned sickness. He even sometimes deserted, although for most, whose homes were in areas ruled by the British, this offered few advantages as the British could be expected to arrest him even if he managed somehow to get home. One group of soldiers even used the British respect for caste against them.

On November 23rd, Willcocks wrote G. H. Q. that

The feeding of Brahmins is a difficulty. This is the highest class of Hindus, and in trench warfare soldiers must be prepared to eat and drink whatever can be given them. . . . It is difficult to please these men. The Officer Commanding 9th Bhopal Infantry after leaving the trenches recently reported that they were unsuited to the exigencies of this form of warfare, also that they undoubtedly influenced Rajputs and Sikhs not to eat biscuits, bread and other ration articles which men in these classes in other regiments are eating.

He also reported that they are thick-headed and unable to show any initiative. I know this caste

of Indians well and I agree with the Commanding Officer.

Under the circumstances, I trust no more Brahmins will be sent here. They are good soldiers in their own particular line but unsuited to this kind of warfare.⁴⁻⁴⁹

Two days later, he asked G. H. Q. to ask if the War Office could get two companies of Punjabi Mohamadens to replace them, stating, "The Brahmins here are now reduced to a nominal number and this is a good opportunity. Brahmins of no use here."⁴⁻⁵⁰ By the middle of December, Crewe was writing Hardinge about the problem⁴⁻⁵¹ but no action seems to have been taken, for Willcocks wrote again about this issue on January 8th, 1915.⁴⁻⁵² It seems never to have occurred to any of them that the Brahmin's "nominal numbers" might have had something to do with their failure to show initiative, and that their sudden concern for caste rules may have sprung from a desire to get out of the trenches. Willcocks, like most of his officers, could not see his men as human beings, only as caste stereotypes.

The casualty reports from the Western Front also affected units waiting to go to France. In Singapore, the Malay States Guides, who had volunteered in early November to go to France, collectively withdrew their offer the next month. The authorities, who considered the unit to have mutinied, disbanded the regiment.⁴⁻⁵³

Willcocks had also lost faith in many of his officers. When the Indian Corps arrived in France, four of its six brigades were commanded by Major-Generals, instead of Brigadier-Generals, and the division commanders were also one step higher than called for, being Lieutenant-Generals rather than Major-Generals.⁴⁻⁵⁴ The strain of the campaign was now telling on these relatively elderly men, and Willcocks knew it. Further, he felt the same way about his Indian officers, who were the bulk of his company commanders.⁴⁻⁵⁵ In both cases, the problem pre-dated the war. Willcocks believed that the War Office had used India as a dumping ground for Generals they wished to reward without giving them command of British troops. The problem was so bad that in combined operations with all-British units, Indian Corps brigade and division commanders often were senior to the division and corps commanders of those units.⁴⁻⁵⁶ A variant of the same system applied to Indian officers, who were promoted only after long service in the ranks and who had most likely never been tested in battle until France.

Nonetheless, all these problems should not be allowed to obscure the general condition of the Indian infantry battalions and of the entire situation. In India, the Government was successfully recruiting men in more than sufficient numbers to meet expected losses.⁴⁻⁵⁷ The "linked battalions" were sending trained reinforcements of "all first class material with fine morale."⁴⁻⁵⁸ Willcocks, although grading his troops in terms of race, was satisfied with most.⁴⁻⁵⁹ The infantry had

been battered, but it was still a significant fighting force, although how long it would remain so was open to question. Charteris put it succinctly, "I am very sorry indeed, for their British officers just now. They are seeing the thing they gave their hearts to, broken."4-60

4. FOOTNOTES

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4-32 "Copy of a D/C letter Major G. A. Jamieson, 9th Bhopal Inf to Brigade Major 7th Ind Inf Bde," 7 November 1914, Appendix I(44), War Diary Lahore Division I7, WO 95/3911.

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5. GREAT GALLANTRY AND MARKED SUCCESS

The first two and a half months of 1915 were easier ones for the Indian infantry, whose losses had amounted to over 8000 officers and men, or 50% of their initial strength.⁵⁻¹ Willcocks, whose dissatisfaction with his senior commanders has already been mentioned, made major changes, relieving old, high ranking officers with younger men more to his liking. Lieutenant General Watkis, relieved for his poor performance at Givenchy, was rewarded with a Knight Commander of the Bath and sent home. Willcocks appointed Major General H. D'U. Keary, commander of the Garwhal Brigade as his successor. In addition, he replaced two Major Generals commanding brigades with Lieutenant Colonels, and two Brigadier Generals commanding brigades with a Colonel and a Lieutenant Colonel respectively. Thus he replaced one of his two division commanders, and five out of six of his brigade commanders, only one of whom was promoted.⁵⁻² A more severe criticism of the pre-war promotion policies and command selection system of the Indian Army would be difficult to find.

It would however be unfair to point the finger of blame solely at the Indian Army in this regard. With the exception of the German army, all of the armies which entered the First World War shared a common problem of ignorance and incompetence among their officer corps.

The Indians spent the first two weeks of January, 1915, in billets in the rear, taking a much needed rest. Lord Crewe, by now aware of their shaky morale, wrote, "There have been various strains of grumbling and discontent at the front" and suggested that any wounded who might be sent home to India not be employed in recruiting duties.⁵⁻³ Hardinge was completely unmoved by the enormous suffering that his army had borne,

The losses of your [Willcock's] Corps have been fairly heavy but not, in my opinion, unduly so, although one or two regiments have suffered very heavily.

It is, I think, a good thing that they should be well blooded. It will improve their self-respect and probably, their fighting qualities. I am not sorry also that they should have seen the desperate fighting in which our English troops have taken part, and that they should have been in a position to appreciate their stamina.⁵⁻⁴

Nonetheless, the two-week rest seemed to do wonders for the morale of the Indians. Sir John French inspected them on January 1st, 1915 and reported to Kitchener that they were "greatly improved."⁵⁻⁵ Willcocks expressed his satisfaction with all but three of his battalions.⁵⁻⁶ Even the letters from the wounded in the hospitals to India were generally "cheerful and stout-hearted."⁵⁻⁷

On January 15th, two brigades of the Corps went back into the line, and by the end of February, all units were taking

part in regular rotation in and out of the trenches.⁵⁻⁸ Morale problems immediately reappeared and the "Indian attitude of mind" seemed "to be rapidly changing for the worse. . . ." ⁵⁻⁹ By February, the mail censor, Mr. E. B. Howell of the Indian Civil Service, selected in part for his wide knowledge of Indian languages, reported that the "breaking strain was near."⁵⁻¹⁰

As is normal with authority when faced with a breakdown in its neatly ordered universe, there was an immediate search for outside treasonous influence. "Seditious" literature was reported early in January⁵⁻¹¹ and fear of sedition increased when General Duff hanged a few mutinous soldiers in India.⁵⁻¹² Howell, however, could find no evidence that any seditious material was being sent to the troops.⁵⁻¹³ One officer suspected that Indian students might be to blame.

When at home on leave early this month, I went to see some men of my regiment in hospital at Bournemouth. It struck me that there were a lot of natives of the student class allowed inside the hospitals . . . many of whom are probably undesirable.⁵⁻¹⁴

Morale seemed firm enough,⁵⁻¹⁵ but in March the discontent surfaced alarmingly.

For most of the Indians, the ultimate escape from combat, desertion to the enemy, was unavailable. Should they do so, the Germans could not easily send them home, and even if they could, home was under British rule which could be expected to

deal harshly with deserters. One group of men however, the Trans-Frontier Pathans, did not need to fear British law at home, for they lived in areas beyond it. One of them, an Afridi, had coolly remarked in January to his British officer that, "If the Germans allied themselves with us Afridis we could lick the world."⁵⁻¹⁶ On March 4th, a few attempted to make such an alliance a reality when one Indian officer and twenty-four men of the 58th Rifles deserted to the enemy in a well organized plan, in three separate parties. The remaining Pathans, about 120, were immediately disarmed.⁵⁻¹⁷ Field Marshal French wanted to send them to Harve immediately, asking the War Office not to send them anywhere where they might come into contact with other Indian troops, suggesting Malta.⁵⁻¹⁸ One officer who witnessed the British reaction to the affair wrote,

This morning a party of 144 Pathans of the 58th Vaughn's Rifles were marched into Locon with a strong guard of Seaforths. They had according to report laid down their arms & refused to take any further part in their work. But worse than this is a report that any number of them . . . have gone over to the enemy.⁵⁻¹⁹

In the end, Willcocks asked that the Afridi companies be given another chance.⁵⁻²⁰ The fact remained however that while the Indian infantry battalions may have seemed to recover while resting, as soon as the shooting started, some elements opted out of the war.

The only explanation Willcocks could offer was "Their nature is not always ours. . . ." ⁵⁻²¹ In February, he rated his battalions by race.

The Gurkhas of today are not the Gurkhas of the Afghan war days. They have not been a great success here and they know it. . . . The Sikhs who first gave trouble are very different now and doing well. . . . The 129th Rifles and the 9th Bhopals will never be of any use. The 8th Gurkhas may come on again, but I have lost faith in them also, they seem dead to the world and I can get no life into them.

Yet in the same paragraph he stated that, "The officers go a long way to making good units." ⁵⁻²² Somehow the contradiction between that statement and his condemnation of entire battalions never occurred to him.

General Keary, commanding the Lahore Division was even more explicit in his racial attitudes. Brahmins were unreliable and unfit to be enlisted; Eastern Rajputs little better and should be eliminated; Hindustani Muslims were unsuitable; Rajputana Jats emphatically not fitted for war; the Pujabi Mahomedan was a bad type, and the Mahsud, although a "fine fighting" man was "turbulent, treacherous, and difficult to discipline in peace." ⁵⁻²³ If one adds to this list Willcocks' poor opinion of the Gurkhas, over one-quarter of the twenty-four castes from which the Indian infantry was drawn had proved themselves wanting in the eyes of their senior commanders. In retrospect, it would seem that the

basic absurdity of the "martial races" should have been obvious, but men do not easily give up lifelong prejudices.

Fortunately, at least the officer supply was improving. Helped by the fact that casualties in January were extremely light, no British officer being killed and only five wounded in the entire Corps,⁵⁻²⁴ officer strength rose steadily. Nevertheless, all knew that further action would lead to more losses. "To make good wastage in officers of Indian Army, we foresee we shall require every suitable candidate we can get," cabled Hardinge.⁵⁻²⁵ No more could be sent from units still in India as their cadres of officer had been drawn down as far as possible.⁵⁻²⁶ Hardinge projected that the Army would need 2240 officers to replace losses for the first twelve months of the war. By the middle of January, he had already recruited 900 into the Indian Army Reserve of Officers, drafted 30 from British units, 100 from the ICS, and 40 from other sources, leaving a deficit of 1200 to be recruited and trained.⁵⁻²⁷ He absolutely refused to send any more regulars of the Indian Army to France as these were already as low as he felt they could get.⁵⁻²⁸ Duff echoed this opinion.

I hope to send you in February a few officers of regular infantry, but I cannot spare any officers of Regular cavalry; Infantry officers of the Indian Army Reserve will make up balance of officers for February. After February, reinforcements of officers both of Cavalry and Infantry must be drawn from the Indian Army Reserve officers. I must retain in

India with the regimental battalions and depots sufficient Regular officers to carry on duties and to train the reserve officers, recruits and horses that you require; in the case of Cavalry, the minimum for these purposes has now been reached, and in the case of Infantry it has almost been reached.⁵⁻²⁹

The shortage of officers foreseen was so great that General Haig suggested that the number of officers assigned to Indian units in the field be reduced to nine.⁵⁻³⁰ Willcocks refused to agree, arguing that "Indian Infantry Corps must have a large number of British officers if they are to meet with any prospect of success."⁵⁻³¹

Regardless of the severe shortage, and of the demonstrated need for them in Indian units, selection boards in India still laid great stress on social considerations.

De Brath 24, son of General De Brath, and Preston socially acceptable but Hindustani very weak. I propose to send out these at once. Clifford, 27 and Smith, 22 both know Hindustani very well but not recommended unless you are very hard up for officers. They are not of the type which commends itself to sepoys.⁵⁻³²

Nonetheless, relieved of the drain of heavy and continual casualties, the British officers of the Indian battalions increased to the point where Willcocks was able to write that, "we are at present very well off indeed."⁵⁻³³ Things would continue to improve so that by the first week of March, just

prior to the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, officer strength would reach 90% of complement.⁵⁻³⁴

Regarding replacement of Indian other ranks, the situation was initially far worse. By the end of December, the strength of the average Indian battalion had reached its lowest point, 470 men, or 65% of complement,⁵⁻³⁵ and even at full strength, an Indian battalion was only 75% that of a British battalion. To exacerbate the situation, the quality of replacements was poor. One officer commented,

While I was in France I saw the Reinforcements of some 5 or 6 regiments and they were uniformly indifferent. . . . One particularly hard case that of the 107th Pioneers. I saw their draft and a more hopeless looking lot I have seldom seen. Far too old and quite unfit for service.⁵⁻³⁶

Part of the problem was due to the sheer number of replacements required. When pressed on the matter, Hardinge complained that "For instance for the Bhopal Battalion alone we have already sent 799 men being more than 100 per cent of the field service strength."⁵⁻³⁷ He also worried about the impact of denuding India of so many troops.

Before the recruits enlisted after the war began are fit for service we shall have used up or passed into the ranks all the reserves of units remaining in India and shall have had to reduce our internal security units by about 25% of men fit for service.

If the larger proportion of these reduced units is then to consist of reservists over 15 years service we consider our position for internal security will be much too weak. Forces in the field must to some extent share in the natural deterioration in standard of efficiency which is inevitable consequence of large wastage in war.⁵⁻³⁸

In short, the army built for garrison duty and short colonial campaigns seemed unable to continue to do a job for which it had not been designed.

Through extreme measures, by the end of January the quality of replacements had improved, but only for a short time. Willcocks reported that "the men now arriving are mostly very good indeed."⁵⁻³⁹ But this situation could not continue. The reinforcements now being sent were no longer reservists or fully trained recruits, but detachments and even companies from other regiments. To continue to send such men meant that India would be stripped of men to defend the frontier and to maintain internal order. Crewe wrote that

. . . the improvement in quality of the recent drafts despatched from India to France must not be accepted as a proof that the military organization in India is capable of indefinitely coping with the difficulties of the situation. . . . The superiority therefore of the recent drafts, so far from proving the elasticity of our military organization, clearly indicates the

probability that India will soon cease to send drafts of a satisfactory standard.⁵⁻⁴⁰

He worried that the units left would not be able to cope simultaneously with an external attack of the frontier and an outbreak of internal unrest.⁵⁻⁴¹

Crewe got no sympathy from the Army Council, concerned as it was with the insatiable manpower needs of the Western Front.

The Army Council fully appreciates the effort which have been made, and they realize the strain which these demands must throw on the Military organization in India: they trust, however, that his organization will prove itself capable of dealing with the difficulties of the situation.⁵⁻⁴²

It did not. By the middle of February, the quality of drafts had fallen again. The medical officer who inspected a draft for the 59th Rifles reported that he ". . . was struck by their poor appearance as regards physique, age, and general bearing." Furthermore, they showed ". . . a general disinclination to be passed fit for the front, . . . the whole draft almost without exception complained of various pains or showed trivial injuries which could not possibly caused them any inconvenience."⁵⁻⁴³ The Indian Base Commander at Marseilles echoed his opinion. He was struck ". . . with the very inferior and unsatisfactory appearance of the men, whose general demeanour pointed to a desire on their part of

presenting as unfavourable impression as possible with the undoubted view of being rejected."⁵⁻⁴⁴ Obviously, information about actual conditions in the trenches had filtered back to these men. Nor was poor quality restricted to this one draft or to the combat troops. Even those recruited as bearers were in poor condition. One physician said, "I personally have seen the majority of the Madrasi bearers sent to this division and think them in physique very inferior . . . and not fit for hard work in this climate."⁵⁻⁴⁵ All Hardinge could do in response to complaints by Field Marshal French was to state that these were the best he could get.⁵⁻⁴⁶

On the other hand, in the long run the situation looked a good deal better. Hardinge wrote, "Recruiting for the army is progressing extraordinarily well"⁵⁻⁴⁷ and "is the best we have had."⁵⁻⁴⁸ Indeed it was going so well that Hardinge worried that if the rate of 8000 per month was maintained, added to the 20,000 already recruited, it might

. . . mean a large surplus of 7,000 of infantry men at close of war⁵⁻⁴⁹ [and] Should the war end without sufficient warning to admit suspension of recruiting some time previously and if we continue to be able to recruit sufficient men we may be left with a surplus of anything from 5,000 to 7,000 men in consequence of long service Indian cavalrymen may take some years and cost anything from £300,000 to £900,000 unless special discharge conditions are given at considerable cost.⁵⁻⁵⁰

Old habits of financial stringency died hard in the bureaucracy. Yet he opposed limiting service to the duration of the war because that might hurt recruiting.⁵⁻⁵¹

Given the enormous losses on the Western Front so far, Hardinge's fears were ill-founded and those closer to the battles recognized them as so. The India Office had a far more realistic view and felt that worrying about an excess of soldiers now was academic. In any case they felt that men would want to get out of the army at the end of the war, and any who did not could be easily absorbed.^{5-52/53}

Meanwhile, Indian opinion, which had enthusiastically supported the war at the beginning was changing as the economic hardships began to be felt. Crewe suspected that the army might be affected. He doubted the "temper and loyalty of the Indian Army" and "that official reports which have reached him regarding certain Indian regiments have not inclined him to take too confident a view of the military situation in India as a whole."⁵⁻⁵⁴ Hardinge requested more censorship.

Letters from wounded Indians in English hospitals now occasionally reach India apparently uncensored and in view of fact that letters from wounded are apt to be unduly pessimistic it is essential that all such should be censored before despatch.⁵⁻⁵⁵

Military censorship is a normal process in armies at war to assure that men do not betray military secrets to the enemy

inadvertently. But Hardinge was now requesting political censorship. He knew that the Empire rested on British prestige, and the war, not yet into its sixth month was already degrading that essential ingredient of British rule. Another mutiny was the constant fear of the British rulers of India for should the Indian Army go in the midst of a great war, so would India. For the first time, the question of some sort of relief of the troops in France arose.

As early as the first of the year, Crewe had written to Hardinge the,

. . . whole question of the Indian troops in Europe, and their future, will need close consideration. . . . At present it seems clear that they have been overdone, with a terrible casualty list. . . . But when we contemplate that it must be at any rate three months before they see anything that would by the utmost generosity be termed sunshine, I don't like the prospect for them.⁵⁻⁵⁶

He continued the next week,

It seems to be generally agreed that to set Indian troops to continue the damp and dreary routine of trenchwork is a mistake from the point of view of morale, and also because the perpetual strain of casualties is greater than your capacity for filling gaps can go on meeting. . . . I think, and Kitchener is disposed to similar view, that Egypt

ought to be regarded as a sort of winter base for them. ⁵⁻⁵⁷

Searching for some reason to explain the poor performance of their beloved "martial races," those commanding them had tried every explanation except the most obvious, that the troops simply were not as devoted to their colonial masters as their masters wanted to believe. Racism, sedition, and now the weather. The fact is that the weather did not affect the Indians much worse than the British. In March, for example, the average percent of Indian sick was 2.45%, that of British units of the Indian Corps, 1.44%.⁵⁻⁵⁸ While the Indian troops did sicken slightly more, this cannot be considered significant, especially when one considers that one time honored way for a soldier to avoid duty is to report sick. As noted earlier, new arrivals tried to do this. We also have the direct testimony of one medical officer who served with the Indians who wrote,

With this exception [trench foot] our men, and I believe the majority of Indians kept in excellent health the whole time they were in France . . . they got warm clothing and plenty of food. . . . I am therefore at a loss to account for the impression . . . that the Indians were specially tried by the climate.⁵⁻⁵⁹

Sir Charles Egerton, a retired General with much Indian experience, and in 1915 a member of the Council of India, felt

that the Indians ought to remain in France until they could be replaced, but then ought to go to Egypt, the Red Sea, or the Persian Gulf, leaving the cavalry in France to represent India. Field Marshal French, on the other hand, perpetually pressed by the French for more men, opposed any withdrawal. So, thought Crewe, did "a certain proportion of the Indians themselves, though by no means all. For some of them, to fight the Germans is the only real way, if not the only way, to be fully engaged in the war."⁵⁻⁶⁰ Just how he came by this information, he did not explain.

Willcocks strongly suggested a middle course. "It is of course useless to anyone to imagine that this Army Corps can go on serving in an indefinitely continued war." He gave the following reasons. First, the Corps had already taken 7100 Indian casualties, future fighting would bring more, and these would be beyond the capacity of the Indian government to replace. Second, he felt that "it would not be politic, or even just to these loyal men, to say 'you must stay to the last man' . . . it gives ground for men too long kept to go sick and thus get away. . . ." He suggested that a definite limit be fixed on the service of the Corps and a date set upon which the Corps would be withdrawn. He also suggested possible rotations of battalions between France and Egypt.⁵⁻⁶¹ Not that he felt that his units were in poor shape, ". . . the Indian troops are, in my opinion far fitter than they were two months ago - that so long as they are not kept here indefinitely. . . ." ⁵⁻⁶² He also proposed a pay increase, to be

called a "European Field Allowance," for Indian officers and men. In total, it would amount to an increase of 25% in their pay. 5-63/64

For both his ideas, pay increases and troop rotation, he received strong support from Field Marshal French,

It is imperative that an announcement be made immediately to the Indian Corps of the grant of special allowance which has already been recommended for those Indian troops serving in France; also any concessions of land which the government may have decided to confer for specially good service in the field.

Willcocks insists on the necessity of making an announcement to the Indians setting a term to their service in Europe, which they think at present is indefinite, until they are all used up. He is of the opinion that this is a most important point if their fighting efficiency is to be maintained. A decision by the government is necessary as to whether it is intended to keep the Indians in France if the war is long drawn out. 5-65

Kitchener the Secretary of State for War and the home government agreed with the pay and land proposals. However, Kitchener strongly opposed fixing a set term of service, "this being contrary to all military traditions." 5-66 Willcocks, in his memoir, quoted him as feeling so strongly about the matter that he said, "Even if only two men are left, one shall be

Lahore and the other Meerut Division."⁵⁻⁶⁷ We can assume he thought all the others would have been killed or wounded, rather than having shot themselves, reported sick, mutinied, or deserted to the enemy.

In early March, just prior to the battle of Neuve Chapelle, Willcocks called a staff conference, including his General officers, at which they reached a unanimous conclusion that after the coming battle, and certainly before the next winter, the battalions in France ought to be relieved by fresh ones and sent elsewhere.⁵⁻⁶⁸ But whatever the decision, there was a battle to be fought, and that would once again test the Indian battalions.

A more pointless battle than Neuve Chapelle would be difficult to find, and its relative success makes it even more ironic. Like most of the British offensives early in the war, it grew out of a French request for a supporting operation to their own attacks. Joffre was in the midst of launching major but spasmodic attacks to the south, the primary result of which was to kill great numbers of French soldiers. In March, he selected Vimy Ridge for his next objective, but to assemble the necessary men for the attack, he had to strip the Ypres sector of French forces. He asked Field Marshal French to launch a supporting attack to tie down German troops in the Ypres sector and prevent them being moved south to oppose his offensive. But Field Marshal French felt that once the French forces were taken from his sector, he would be too weak to attack. Accordingly, he decided to attack before Joffre took

them away.⁵⁻⁶⁹ Thus the very purpose of the attack was negated. Launched before the French offensive, it could give no real support to it.

Tactically, however, Neuve Chapelle was a great success. Sir John gave responsibility for the operation to Sir Douglas Haig, commanding the newly organized First Army. The sector for the attack was well chosen. The Germans had only one division there and Haig, in great secrecy, massed four times that number to oppose them. The Royal Flying Corps did such an excellent job of photo-reconnaissance that the staff was able to provide detailed maps showing the attacking units every enemy position.⁵⁻⁷⁰ Haig also managed to mass great numbers of artillery pieces to support the infantry.⁵⁻⁷¹

On March 10th, preceded by a thirty-five minute artillery bombardment, the British moved forward and overwhelmed the surprised and outnumbered Germans. For the first time in the war, the allies had achieved a clean penetration of the German trench line.⁵⁻⁷² The Indians, attacking the area of the village of Neuve Chapelle itself, reached all of their initial objectives, but for offensive as a whole, Haig had selected too narrow a front, the staffs were unprepared to exploit the breakthrough, and commanders, out of communication with their men, lost control of their units. In the end, fatal delays allowed the Germans time to bring up reinforcements and plug the gap.⁵⁻⁷³

The Indians, however, for the first time since their introduction into France, were an unqualified success. Sir

John reported to the War Office on March 14th that the Indian troops under Sir James Willcocks fought with great gallantry and marked success in the capture of Neuve Chapelle, and subsequent fighting which took place. . . . The fighting was very severe and the losses heavy, but nothing daunted them. Their tenacity, courage, and endurance were admirable, and worthy of the best traditions of the soldiers of India. 5-74

Willcocks himself was jubilant,

. . . how well our brave Indian troops fought at Neuve Chapelle. . . . I am more pleased than I can tell you. . . . Here they were the attackers, not the attacked. They advanced over withering fire . . . the Sikhs, Mahomadens, Gurkhas, Dogras, and last but first the brave Garwhalis. . . . The 2nd Gurkhas retrieved all they had lost . . . the 9th ditto, and so on . . . all did well. 5-75

The cost, as usual, was heavy, especially among the crucial and hard to replace British officers. In the midst of the battle, emergency reinforcements of British Indian Army officers stationed in England training the New Armies had to be rushed over. 5-76/77 But the losses were not confined just to British officers. In three days of battle, the Meerut Division lost 19% of its Indian soldiers, 24% of its Indian officers, 27% of its British officers, and 21% of its British

soldiers.⁵⁻⁷⁸ Also as usual, certain regiments bore the brunt of the losses. The 47th Sikhs went from 12 British officers, 18 Indian officers, and 637 other ranks to 5 British officers, 7 Indian officers, and 130 other ranks in two days of battle, a loss of almost 80%.⁵⁻⁷⁹ The 59th Rifles and the 4th Seaforth's, a British regiment, suffered equally severe losses, and at the end of the battle the three regiments combined stood at only 16% strength⁵⁻⁸⁰

Hardinge was delighted at the performance of the Indian battalions and at their improved morale⁵⁻⁸¹ but appalled at the necessity to replace the heavy casualties.

The whole question of drafts for the next three months until recruits enlisted after the war commenced begin to be available is one of the greatest difficulty. Practically there are no men available for drafts within the links to which the battalions in France belong. Outside these links battalions have already been drawn upon to an excessive extent, and volunteers are not forthcoming always.⁵⁻⁸²

To the India Office worry that the constant drain of troops from India to France left India defenseless, the War Office replied,

The maintenance of British rule in India is a duty of high importance, resting in some measure upon the Army Council as you point out: but it is not a duty which can claim to be paramount over all others.

Scarcely any part of the British Empire at the present time can be said to be completely immune from external aggression or to have complete security for internal peace: and it is not possible that India should escape her share of these risks which all parts of the empire are running at the present time.⁵⁻⁸³

Losses might be appalling, India might be running risks, but the Indian battalions had attacked and fought well. The Indian Corps seemed solid now, but would that solidity last?

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6. ONCE MORE INTO THE BREACH

That the Indian infantry had done well in the battle of Neuve Chapelle was beyond dispute, but the great losses again slashed at the strength of the battalions. Many of the new replacements had been lost during the battle and those that remained were now battle shaken. Some of the battalions retained less than a third of the men who had originally come to France.⁶⁻¹ Willcocks and his senior officers knew that this rate of loss could not be accepted indefinitely.

As things go on at present, there cannot eventually be a single man of the original lot left by that time . . . there are some corps [battalions] who will not last out a very prolonged war. Their original men are practically no more, and the later arrivals are of course inferior in every way. . . . My contention is two fold. First, that in no circumstances should these same corps remain another winter in France. Second that I should be allowed to let a certain number of men gradually return to India.⁶⁻²

Beyond dispute also, was that the morale of the surviving men had entered another decline. Wounded soldiers writing home expressed common feelings about the war. As might be expected, they showed little patriotic zeal.⁶⁻³ Sentiments of

loyalty to the Raj, once so common were now few and far between. Now they asked about reports of unrest in India. Most were pessimistic, believing that they would die in the war unless they were sent home to India, and they advised their relations not to volunteer for the Army.⁶⁻⁴ Willcocks reported that even men of what he felt was his best regiment, the 1/39th Garwhalis, wanted to go home.⁶⁻⁵ And, of course, the letters home affected recruiting. "I hear from our depot (1/39th Garwhalis) that it is very hard to get recruits now. . . ."⁶⁻⁶ For the majority, who had enlisted expecting at most a few short colonial campaigns, the lesson of the impersonal brutality of Flanders was clear. Sacrifice might be demanded of a soldier in certain wars, but "this is not such a war." The message home was to stay there and stay alive.⁶⁻⁷

The heavy losses and lack of replacements for some units required unit changes. Willcocks amalgamated the two Garwhali battalions, adding the 40th Pathans as a replacement.⁶⁻⁸ Already, in December, an extra British battalion of territorials had been added to each Brigade, so that each brigade now consisted of two British battalions and three Indian battalions.⁶⁻⁹

On the front line itself, things were quiet until the end of April. Then, in a combination of technical innovation and tactical folly, the Germans launched the first gas attack of the war against the Ypres salient, and the second Battle of Ypres began. Neuve Chapelle had been an example of a British

tactical success without any strategic significance. Here at Ypres, the Germans followed the same path. von Falkenhayn, Chief of the German General Staff was committed to the defensive in the West as he sought a decision against the Russians. Nevertheless, he had at his disposal a new weapon, poison gas released from cylinders, and if he had doubts about its effectiveness, he was at least persuaded to try it. He picked Ypres because here his advisors told him the winds were most likely to be favorable, but this was to be an experiment, not an attempt to create the conditions for a major success. Although eleven German divisions faced five British and two French, he did not allocate the necessary reserve forces to exploit a breakthrough, should it occur.

On April 22nd, after a short but heavy artillery preparation, the Germans opened the valves of their chlorine gas cylinders opposite the French divisions. The French front did not merely collapse, it disappeared as their soldiers, totally unprepared and unprotected against the new weapon, threw down their rifles and ran. The Germans marched two miles through the vacated French positions but, as unprepared as the French for the effects of the gas, they then stopped.⁶⁻¹⁰

To regain the useless land the Germans had occupied, the British launched a series of disjointed and poorly organized counter-attacks, in which the Indian battalions played their share, again taking extreme losses.⁶⁻¹¹ Ten minutes after one battalion went into action, it dropped from a strength of 12 British officers, 16 Indian officers, and 650 other ranks to 4

British officers, 3 Indian officers, and 170 men.⁶⁻¹² The Jullundur Brigade took 1385 casualties out of its total strength of 2250, or 55%, and those battalions actually engaged in the fighting took 67% casualties.⁶⁻¹³ The other two brigades of the Lahore Division fared as badly. The battalions of the Sirhind Brigade averaged only 300 men at the end of a few days of battle, and the Ferozepore Brigade had only 31% of its men left.⁶⁻¹⁴

Unlike the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, here the thirty mile forced march to get to the battlefield, the heavy losses, the lack of success, and the general uncertainty caused a sharp drop in fighting efficiency among the Indian soldiers. Some retreated without orders.

The French in withdrawing got mixed up with our troops and the greater portion of our line becoming affected by their retirement and the gas fumes withdrew, also the retirement not being checked until our troops had withdrawn behind our front line.⁶⁻¹⁵

A message from the Sirhind Brigade commander stated that "Sirhind Brigade trying to push on but report very shaken some men giving way."⁶⁻¹⁶

The impact of the fighting on the Indians seemed to generate a feeling of despair of survival. The Censor reported ominously that "one is tempted to hazard the prediction that this feeling must sooner or later culminate in a regrettable incident."⁶⁻¹⁷ Certainly, lurking as ever in the consciousness of the British rulers of India was the knowledge

of another "regrettable incident," the Mutiny of 1857. Signs of unrest among the army remaining in India had already appeared. In early March, Hardinge wrote the India Office,

I have distinct and irrefutable proof of a revolutionary conspiracy for a rising to take place between the 15th March and 15th June. Sikhs, Mahammadans, and Bengalis are all in it. The number so far may possibly not be very great, but the intentions are serious. . . . 6-18

By April 1st, it was more than intention.

. . . a revolutionary emissary with twelve loaded bombs was caught in the lines of the 12th Cavalry at Meerut. It was through the cooperation of some Pathans in the regiment that the man was caught, but it is fairly clear that some of the sowars, probably Sikhs, were in the conspiracy. 6-19

But, so far at least, this extreme unrest was confined to India and had not yet affected the troops in France. The war there went on as usual.

In May, Field Marshal French launched repeated spasmodic and ineffective attacks both to regain the lost ground and to once again support equally useless French army offensives to the south. The main impact of these on the Indian soldiers was to cause more casualties and to eat further away at their already shaky morale. On May 1st, the Indian troops of the Sirhind Brigade failed to "go over the top" and attack. The Brigade was withdrawn that night. 6-20 Among the Indian

soldiers spread the feeling, false though it was, that the British were sacrificing Indians to save British troops. The Censor reported that,

This feeling, coupled with despondency as to surviving the war and hopelessness as to returning to India, is likely to produce a somewhat pernicious effect on the morale of the native troops in Europe which will probably react with cumulative force on the feelings and passions of the populace of India. . . . 6-21

Willcocks again wrote Hardinge that some of the first arrivals had had enough.⁶⁻²² By the end of May, the letters home to India were actively discouraging enlistment and "The feeling of total destruction, or despondency" was "rife as usual."⁶⁻²³ Further, the soldiers no longer saw Britain as an invincible giant astride her Empire, for ". . . a considerable impression of the power and weight of Germany has been produced on the native troops."⁶⁻²⁴

The Meerut and Lahore Divisions in France had by this time taken such severe losses that both division commanders requested that their units be relieved. "Time is required to train . . . , to re-organize companies, and give officers and men a chance of getting to know one another," wrote General Keary, G.O.C. of the Lahore Division.⁶⁻²⁵ He reported an average strength of 430, or 57% of complement, in each of his eight Indian battalions, and recommended that two of them, the 9th Bhopals and the 129th Baluchis, be withdrawn from France, and that the 57th and 59th Rifles be amalgamated.⁶⁻²⁶ General

Anderson, G.O.C. of the Meerut Division, reported that four of his battalions, the 39th Garwhalis, 6th Jats, 58th and 125th Rifles were either of questionable effectiveness or "not fit . . . as a unit of the fighting line."⁶⁻²⁷ Willcocks accepted their opinions, asking higher headquarters that the 9th Bhopals and 125th Rifles be sent to Egypt immediately and that the 59th Rifles, 129th Baluchis, and 39th Garwhalis follow as soon as replacement units arrived. Further, he requested that the strength of the Indian Corps be reduced to the Meerut Division and a reserve brigade.⁶⁻²⁸ Except for the relief of the 9th Bhopals and 125th Rifles by the 69th and 89th Pathans, his request was refused.⁶⁻²⁹

The heavy losses had done more than sap the morale and strength of the units in France. For the first time, the Government of India could not supply sufficient men to replace the gaps in the ranks. The moment they had warned about since the beginning of the war had arrived. Duff wrote to Hardinge that if the War Office continued,

to push the Indian Army Corps in the forefront of every battle it will soon cease to exist as such for our Indian Army system does not admit of the replacement of casualties on such a scale.⁶⁻³⁰

Indeed, Crewe felt that the problem of replacing losses was so great that it called into question the retention of the Indian Corps in France.⁶⁻³¹

Besides losing many Indian soldiers in April and May, losses among British officers had been high as usual, some

battalions losing almost all their white officers. Again, replacements for them were a problem. Officers of Indian units had to have some knowledge of Indian languages and Indian culture to be effective, and such white men were hard to find. Yet, if the British could have looked beyond the color bar, India's people could surely have produced the few thousand officers necessary, as it did in World War II.

The possibility of granting the King's Commission, as opposed to the Viceroy's Commission, to Indians had been explored before the war. As far back as 1858, when the British government had assumed direct rule of India, it had issued a proclamation promising that all government positions would be open to Indians, but it had never followed through in the case of the Army. By 1911, British policy in India rested on placating the aristocracy of India. Hardinge and Crewe, always looking for ways to reward its loyalty to the Raj thought that the sons of "Ruling Chiefs and nobles" might be given the King's Commission.⁶⁻³² The major stumbling block was the attitude of the Officer Corps of the Indian Army, racist to the core, and adamantly opposed to such an idea. As Hardinge wrote to Crewe, "I hope you will not allow the military their way entirely about commissions in the Native Army for the sons of Ruling Chiefs, for if you do nothing will be done."⁶⁻³³

Educated and influential Indians applied pressure from the other direction, for once the possibility of giving the King's Commission to Indians had been raised, they could not

accept restricting its issue to the aristocracy. Hardinge wrote Crewe on February 9th, 1911,

An Indian non-official Member of Council has put forward a resolution . . . urging the admission of natives of British India to Commissioned ranks in the British service of the Native Army. This is a different question to that of the sons of the ruling chiefs. . . . 6-34

Once raised, the pressure on the Government of India to reach a decision was continuous. "I am most anxious" wrote Hardinge "that you [Crewe] should get the question settled. . . . It is really a burning question." 6-35 All during the rest of that year, the Government of India considered various schemes of commissioning Indians, but all were objected to by someone for one reason or another. The major stumbling block was that the holder of the King's Commission, be he British, Canadian, Australian, or anyone else, had the authority to command subordinate officers and men, regardless of color. The possibility of a black man ordering a white British officer about sent shudders through the War Office. 6-36 Yet British policy was overtly anti-racist. The essence of the problem was how to be racist without appearing racist. In the end, that problem proved insoluble, and nothing was done.

The question lay dormant until the war, but then, Gokhale, that most moderate, conciliatory, and pro-British of Indian politicians, raised the issue again. After a visit from him in October, 1914, Crewe wrote Hardinge,

I have just had a visit from Gokhale. . . . His only separate request to me was on the subject over which you and I and others racked our brains so desperately, that of Commissions in the Army, which he thought might be conferred in the course of the war. I told him frankly . . . that in my opinion the question was bound to emerge in a new light, either during the war or at its close.⁶⁻³⁷

But as Hardinge wrote later,

The difficulty remains as acute as ever. A British sub-lieutenant would refuse to take orders from an Indian Captain and an English Tommy would ignore the orders of an Indian officer. The latter eventuality is far more serious than the first for I think the first could be enforced and recognized in time but never the latter. Then again the present war has brought out very clearly that the Indian troops do not rely on their native officers and are completely lost without their British officers.⁶⁻³⁸

Nothing had been resolved by the beginning of 1915. Not even the civilians, demonstrably less overtly racist than the military, wanted to force the issue. Crewe hoped for

. . . some way . . . by which the principle might be established, while evading the manifold difficulties of any general system. As we all know, the

appearance of equality is what the vocal classes in India value, far more than reality: and if, for instance, two or three of the minor members of great houses, showing any personal turn for professional soldiering, could be given commissions, I believe that opinion in India would be quite soothed. 6-39

But military opposition did not waiver. General Sir O'Moore Creagh, ex-Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army stated that ". . . an Indian boy as a rule is not as strong as an English boy and his brain cannot digest the many subjects in which the former is educated without detriment to his physical powers." 6-40 Willcocks was far more adamant on the subject. While admitting that granting a few commissions to Indians would be a wise move politically, he believed that Indians were essentially inferior beings. His lengthy letter to Crewe of January 31, 1915 on the subject was an articulate synopsis of the attitude of the Officer Corps of the Indian Army.

No one has a greater admiration for the Indian soldier, and officer when he lives to it, than I have. He's generally brave, nearly always loyal - but he is seldom if ever fit to replace the British officer. Immediately you touch on this point you strike the bedrock of the reason we own India. The Indian is simply not fit to lead his men against Europeans; he will lead a charge or cover a

retirement, but if he has to think he fails. In these trenches he is helpless as a rule; i. e. everything except the pluck. What he has seen done he can do again under favorable conditions, but it is useless to appeal to him to replace even the last joined subaltern, or frequently even a British soldier fallen by chance into a fight along with Indian soldiers as proved more than once in our fighting. It is the presence and natural instincts of the white man which the Indian Officer can never replace. Indeed as I range over the whole field of possibilities I cannot conceive of a case in which the Indian Officer can be given the status and responsibility of a British officer, i. e. if the efficiency (the fighting efficiency) of Units is to be kept up to a high standard - The Indian has not the instincts which make leaders in modern war.

He went on to say,

Of course I do not deny that amongst them there must be some such men, but after 37 years service I cannot put my hand on one. What then you may ask is the solution? You could of course have Units not meant for actual fighting line officered by Indians and they would do it well, but I would be very sorry as a General to have any such under my command in war. There is in fact no solution; the European and the

Indian are built on different lines, the one to command men, the other to wait for guidance before he issues his commands. I do not believe you will find a single officer in the Army with real experience of war who will say otherwise.⁶⁻⁴¹

Willcocks cited as evidence to support his point the poor performance of the Indian Viceroy Commissioned Officers in the trenches, but at least one observer had something other than a racial explanation for it:

. . . the native indian officers have not had adequate technical and professional training, and partly because their present position of subordination to British officers in the regiment is calculated to impare any initiative or leadership they may have originally possessed.⁶⁻⁴²

Blind to all arguments, Willcocks held to his position, believing that "the day they try to officer units with Indians, that day will see the end of efficient fighting units."⁶⁻⁴³

By July, 1915 Crewe was gone from the India Office, replaced in May by Austin Chamberlain, a man more liberal than his predecessor. Chamberlain took up the issue again.

I gather from the papers in this Office that the authorities both in India and in this Office are agreed in thinking that the time has come when commissions in the Army ought to be granted to carefully selected Indians, but that opposition from

the Army Council, supported in other quarters has hitherto prevented this from being done.⁶⁻⁴⁴

Even after the Indian troops had been withdrawn from France, conflict on this issue continued. In November, Chamberlain suggested to Hardinge that "early action" seemed desirable to "mark the part played by Indian troops in the war and refute the colour bar theory." He proposed commissioning a few officers of the armies of the so-called Princely States of India into the British Army.⁶⁻⁴⁵ But the Army remained unalterably opposed. Duff had no doubt that whatever political advantages might be gained, commissioning Indians would adversely affect the efficiency of the Army.⁶⁻⁴⁶

By early 1916, demands for commissions in the Army from the soldiers themselves came to Hardinge's attention.

. . . before the war, the demand for commissions for Indians was a great deal stronger than from within the army itself. This has all been changed from the day that the Indian Regiments valiantly passed through their baptism of fire on European battlefields. They have seen how quickly their small band of British officers can be swept away, they have seen or heard that in the French or Russian armies, men of the African and Asiatic regiments may rise to full commissioned rank. They have seen Turkish officers bravely leading their troops in the most modern warfare, and they

must ask themselves why to Indians alone this privilege should be denied.⁶⁻⁴⁷

Part of the army's fear was that commissions might be offered to men not of the "martial races." The British officer's inculcated suspicion of intelligence and his glorification of athletic prowess over the ability to think has been systematically dealt with by Norman F. Dixon in his book, On the Psychology of Military Incompetence.⁶⁻⁴⁸ His argument that the "public school" educational system of the British middle classes rewarded conformity, obedience, and loyalty while devaluing intellectual activity is compelling. Is it possible that the British officer's distaste and contempt for the "babu", the educated Indian, masked a fear of intellectual inferiority? Certainly, if Indians to be commissioned were to be selected by competitive examination, they might easily be the intellectual superiors of most officers. We have already seen that the martial races theory systematically excluded the most progressive and educated groups, and included some of the most backward castes of India. In any case, Duff insisted on a system of nomination to exclude men of the "non-fighting races".⁶⁻⁴⁹

Chamberlain carefully built his case for commissioning Indians, enlisting the support of highly placed members of the Indian Civil Service. To placate the Army, Hardinge agreed that all candidates would be drawn from the martial classes,⁶⁻⁵⁰ but it was not until June of 1917, nearly three years after

Gokhale's visit to Crewe, that Chamberlain ordered the War Office to prepare to commission Indians.

In view of the difficulty of supplying sufficient officers of pure European descent to the Indian Army, of the effect on recruiting of the racial bar, of the Government of India's strong recommendation, of the widespread demand in India for higher military employment of Indians, and of India's services to the Empire during the war . . . the time has arrived when the principle of the granting of King's commissions to India must be admitted.⁶⁻⁵¹

On July 5th, the Army Council once more attempted to block the inevitable, writing Chamberlain,

. . . after the most careful consideration they have come to the conclusion that to grant commissions to natives of India would entail a great risk from a military point of view, in that it involves placing native Indian officers in a position where they would be entitled to command European officers.⁶⁻⁵²

Nevertheless, on July 10th, Chamberlain formally proposed to the War Cabinet that ten Indians be appointed to Sandhurst each year and to receive, upon completion of the program, the King's Commission.⁶⁻⁵³

The debate in the War Cabinet pitted the Secretary of State for War, Lord Derby, speaking for the Army, and the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Walter Long, against

Chamberlain. Derby argued that if Indians were commissioned, British officers would not join the Indian Army since they might some day have to serve under an Indian. Long spoke of difficulties if they were placed in command of Canadian or Australian troops.⁶⁻⁵⁴ In spite of these arguments, the War Cabinet accepted the principle of commissioning Indians and directed that seven captains and two lieutenants be commissioned immediately. Only Derby and Sir Edward Carson, without portfolio but an ex-Colonial Minister voted against it.⁶⁻⁵⁵ The next day, India was informed that the British government was now prepared to

. . . gradually open out to Indians of warlike races careers in the army, giving them, as far as circumstances permit, opportunities of advancement equal to those enjoyed by Indians of non-fighting classes in the various branches of the civil administration.⁶⁻⁵⁶

Thus sounded the death knell of the Victorian Indian army.

That the argument took years to resolve, long after the imperative need for officers was evident in France, shows the enormous impact of racist ideology on the officer corps. Even after years of argument, the number accepted for commissioning was too small to fill any real need. The military problem was quite real as has been shown, but the response was predicated on ideological lines. India's 100 million people could not possibly provide the few thousand officers needed because the British officer corps knew Indians were inferior, and no

amount of evidence or reasoned argument could convince them differently. But even as the debate over commissions went on in London and Delhi, in June of 1915, the men of the Indian Corps, British and Indian, officer or other rank, had a much simpler problem to solve, that of staying alive in the endless horror of Flanders.

6. FOOTNOTES

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6-2 Willcocks to Hardinge, 28 March 1915, Hardinge 102/1/1560a.

6-3 Censor Report, 3 April 1915, IOL L/MIL/5/825.

6-4 Censor Report, 10 April 1915, IOL L/MIL/5/825.

6-5 Willcocks to Hardinge, 28 March 1915, Hardinge 102/1/1560a.

6-6 Report from Lt-Colonel D. H. Drake to A. A. & Q. M. G., HQ Meerut Division, 23 April 1915, War Diary of A & Q, IAC, May 1915, WO 95/1092.

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6-9 Merewether and Smith, The Indian Corps in France, p. 171.

6-10 Falls, The Great War, p. 111.

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6-12 Major Frederick C. G. Campbell, Chapters from a Soldier's Life (privately printed letters), NAM 92 CAMP, 27 April 1915, p. 63.

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6-23 "Supplementary Letters forwarded by the Censor, Indian Mails in France," 29 May 1915, Crewe I/19(8).

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6-25 Maj-General Keary to Indian Corps, 20 May 1915, Appendix 2.P., Extract from War Diary General Staff Lahore Division, May 1915, Army Headquarters 245, WO 95/3915.

6-26 Keary to Willcocks, No. G 972, Appendix 106 War Diary A & Q, IAC, May 1915, WO 95/1092.

6-27 Maj-General C. A. Anderson, G. O. C. Meerut Division to Willcocks, 20 May 1915, Appendix 106 War Diary A & Q, IAC, May 1915, WO 95/1092.

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6-30 Duff to Hardinge, 22 May 1915, Hardinge 65/f204.

6-31 Note by "E y J," 7 May 1915, Crewe I/19(5).

6-32 Hardinge to Crewe, 4 January 1911, Crewe C/19.

6-33 Hardinge to Crewe, 25 January 1911, Crewe C/19.

6-34 Hardinge to Crewe, 9 February 1911, Crewe C/19.

6-35 Hardinge to Crewe, 15 February 1911, Crewe C/19.

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7. RACE AND SEX

The condition of the Indian Corps by the end of May, 1915 was such that its fighting efficiency had been seriously impaired. Both British and Indian battalions were very weak, and in the Indian units, the lack of experienced officers, the newness of many officers and sepoy, and the lack of caste uniformity among the replacements all convinced Willcocks that a major reorganization was imperative. He requested Haig to withdraw immediately the Indian Corps from the line and to reorganize it by disbanding the Lahore Division and using its units and personnel to bring the Meerut Division up to strength and to form a reserve brigade.⁷⁻¹ Each of the new brigades, both in the reserve and the Meerut Division, was to receive an additional British battalion in place of an Indian battalion, thereby leaving only two Indian battalions per brigade to three British.⁷⁻² Secretary of War Kitchener took strong objection to this proposed new structure, writing to General Duff,

In my opinion [this] might have a bad effect in India, as well as at the front, by encouraging the idea that the Indian troops were becoming worn out, and that as having no further combattant value they were being withdrawn from the fighting line. . . .

[We should] preserve as long as possible the original formation and organization even though

by this the retention of units may be necessitated after their effective strength has fallen very considerably below the complete establishment.⁷⁻³

Duff agreed, and suggested that if he was allowed to exchange the depleted units with battalions then in Egypt, he had good hopes of being able to keep the Indian Infantry in Force A in the field for 6 or 7 months [but] after that time [it] depends on recruiting.⁷⁻⁴

General Sir Edmund Barrow, Secretary to the Military Department of the India Office, was more pessimistic.

. . . as a base from which to maintain our armies in the field at their present strength India is already failing us, and . . . a reduction in strength of the Indian infantry in France may soon be forced upon us.⁷⁻⁵

Lieutenant Lewis, commander of the 129th Baluchis, put it more succinctly, ". . . we are ludicrously weak."⁷⁻⁶ On June 26th, his unit stood at only 27% of complement.⁷⁻⁷

The government's only hope for supplying sufficient replacements to France lay in its recruiting program in India. There, letters from the front continued to counsel relatives against enlisting, and the Government of India was most anxious that this should stop. They requested more extensive censorship of letters, asking that any such passages be erased or, if necessary, the entire letter be suppressed.⁷⁻⁸

Whatever the reason, news from the front or letters home, recruiting had taken a sharp drop. Hardinge wrote Chamberlain that,

Recruiting has fallen off from 9,000 a month to 6,000 a month, and it is difficult to get any more Sikhs and Dogras. 7-9

He was anxious that the scheme of trading battalions with Egypt be adopted, writing Willcocks,

. . . it is impossible to supply from this country sufficient soldiers to make good the wastage. . . . It may be that some of our sources of recruitment are being dried up. 7-10

Despite the fall off in recruiting, Chamberlain, like his military advisors, was still a captive of the martial races theory.

Please cable if recruiting fallen off lately in consequence of discouraging reports and if so in what particular classes. I trust you are not compelled to enlist inferior classes to maintain establishment as obviously temporary deficiency is lesser evil than permanent deterioration in type of classes enlisted. 7-11

Hardinge was quick to reassure him. Even though only 10,000 men had been recruited during April and May, compared to 14,000 in the previous two months, and even though the Indian battalions in France were dying from lack of replacements, "inferior" classes would not be recruited. "Only recruits of recognized

fighting classes have been taken" although the Government was attempting, without much success, to enlist "certain good classes which have hitherto furnished recruits."⁷⁻¹² Military necessity once again bowed before the demands of racism.

Among the Indian soldiers remaining in France, morale continued to drop steadily. The Censor again reported that "The tone of letters dealt with . . . is quite . . . despondent."⁷⁻¹³ Another sign of poor morale, malingering, was rife. In his diary, Captain Bagot-Chester of the 2/3rd Gurkhas, recorded the following incident.

My orderly . . . returned from hospital tonight.

. . . He amused me with his stories of the fearful shamming sick which goes on amongst the Indians of native regiments there.⁷⁻¹⁴

Further, when Indian units were withdrawn from the trenches, instead of being impeccably dressed, they were now so sloppy that Willcocks was forced to issue a directive on the subject.

. . . much sloppiness has again crept in. . . .

This is especially the case with Indian soldiers.

It is no uncommon sight to see them slouching about the streets of towns and villages dressed in a most slovenly and unsoldierly manner.⁷⁻¹⁵

As the Indian battalions got weaker, both in strength and morale, the possibility of total withdrawal came up again, and whatever the military reasons for or against withdrawal, uppermost in the minds of Chamberlain, Kitchener, and Duff was

what the result of such a move would be on Indian opinion about British rule in India. As Howell, the Mail Censor put it,

The net result of this war on the prejudices and feelings of the native population in India is one of the most eminently interesting outcomes of this campaign. 7-16

Duff adamantly opposed withdrawal, writing Kitchener that politically the effect in India of the return of regiments depleted by the war, from the field of action, before we have won some definite success or before the campaign is over, is much to be deprecated. It will be taken to mean that the British have been defeated, people will widely believe the agitators' stories that regiments have been sent to Europe to be destroyed, recruiting for the Army will be adversely affected, an immense impulse will be given to the preaching of Jihad in Afghanistan, among the north-west frontier tribesmen, and in India itself, and the field for active revolutionary agitation in India will be extended. The Indian Army had [sic] proceeded to Europe to support the British Army in the field and they must see it through. 7-17

Chamberlain agreed, telegraphing Hardinge,

We agree with you that it politically desirable to keep both Indian Divisions in France till some

definite success or approach of winter justify withdrawal of Indian Army Corps. In any case Lord Kitchener and I are adverse to returning infantry to India at present and would prefer that surplus of units should be transferred to Egypt till their morale has been restored by rest and victory. . . .

Sir John French [believes that] Indian units are ineffective in numbers and morale . . . we are prepared to insist on acceptance of the view that, though advisable to withdraw the bulk of Indian regiments from the fighting line, character of the force as an Indian Army Corps must be maintained.⁷⁻¹⁸

For the time being at least, the Indian battalions would stay, and as they stayed, they were exposed for the first time in their lives to the European scene. In rest areas, in hospitals, and at their base camp in Marseilles, their contacts with Europeans, and with Indians other than their own regiments, allowed the formation and interchange of views on an unprecedented scale. Howell put it well.

As all the regiments in France are now composed of so many different units there must be a wide interchange of views on various topics. So that this war will do more towards giving the nations of India a practical insight in European manners and customs than several generations of education.⁷⁻¹⁹

In particular, Indian soldiers were no different from any others and the manners and customs of available women irresistibly attracted their interest. In no other area were the British so sensitive as to the possible result of intercultural communication. The British attitude toward the relationship between white women and Indian men was expressed as a concern with British "prestige". Aware that their rule in India rested on that elusive reality, the governing classes, civilian and military, believed that an integral part of that prestige was the high status they wanted Indians to accord to white women. This belief permeated their attitudes and could be taken, and often was, to ludicrous extremes. For example, in late 1913, Miss Maud Allen, an "exotic" dancer who had performed in Britain and on the Continent proposed a series of engagements in India. Hardinge, reflecting the standard British-in-India sensitivity on the issue wrote privately to Crewe,

Maud Allen, the dancer, proposes to arrive in Calcutta next November and to dance in public. . . . [I] consider that dances would have a most unfortunate effect in India. The Bengalis would be delighted and would crowd to the theatre to witness what they would regard as the public degradation of an English woman. I consider the effect would be so objectionable that . . . we shall be justified in stopping her.⁷⁻²⁰

Hardinge's problem was difficult. Miss Allen's dance was not illegal, and indeed, Hardinge did not object to her performing

before white audiences. Therefore he had no way to stop her. The issue was not the propriety of the dance, but the attempt to maintain the essentially false position of the white woman in India. In the end, Miss Allen danced before a mixed audience, and to quote the "Daily Chronicle."

Bookings for the performance of Miss Maud Allen opened here today. An immense crowd of Europeans and Indians besieged the office, overturning the counter. The bookings far exceed all records.⁷⁻²¹

In India, contacts between Indian soldiers and white women were unlikely. The white woman who came to India was encouraged by prevailing social mores to look upon Indians as dirty, ignorant, inferiors and, except for servants, to limit contacts with them to a minimum. Also, even if she was so inclined, the small size and endless gossip of the British community in the cantonments would have made keeping secret a liaison very difficult. On his part, the Indian soldier was unlikely to seek such a relationship. He married early and his wife generally lived with him on the cantonment, and, in any case, Indian prostitutes could be easily found.

On foreign service in areas with non-white populations, British officers of Indian battalions seemed to worry only about venereal disease, not about sexual contact itself. When some Indian battalions debarked in Egypt on their way to France, the troops were warned about VD and that catching a preventable disease was a punishable offense, but no attempt

was made to limit the Indians' sexual activity. When the Corps reached France however, its commanders saw the situation in an entirely different light. There the women were white, seemed untouched by British racial attitudes, and were willing to have sexual contacts with Indian soldiers. The British officer corps had here the same problem as had Hardinge; how to maintain the essentially false position of white women which they had created and which they felt essential to British rule. Hardinge, with the full weight of the Government of India at his disposal had been unable to stop a single woman dancer. How much more difficult was the situation in France, on soil controlled by a people who thought the British attitude on race ridiculous.

Trouble, from the British point of view, began almost upon landing in Marseilles. The French people liked the Indians and greeted them warmly. One British officer wrote in his diary,

I must say it goes against the grain to see white women shaking hands with the men, but it has to be I suppose. . . . I had a few words [with the men] on this subject before leaving the ship saying how different were all our customs W. of Suez.⁷⁻²²

On the fighting line and in its immediate rear where there were few if any women, keeping them away from the Indians was not too difficult, but at the Marseilles base camp, it was far more complicated. There, the major administrative and logistical base for the Indian Corps had been established,

which included a processing center for replacements and returning wounded. Thus a large number of Indians lived there outside their battalion structure, surrounded by a society in which the bulk of the indigenous white male population was away at the front, and further, being a seaport, was fully used to providing females to single males.

In an attempt to keep the Indians and French women apart, the British placed severe restrictions on the off base activity of Indian soldiers, the major purpose of which was to prevent sexual liaisons between Indian soldiers and white women. Malcom Seton, Secretary of the Judicial and Public Department of the India Office wrote,

As regards Marseilles, the main cause of discontent seems to be that the French allow their African troops the same privileges as Europeans: [he] is as good as a Frenchman, whereas the Indian is kept under various restrictions. I do not see how these restrictions can be relaxed, or how their retention can fail to create a very bitter feeling.⁷⁻²³

No wonder, as the penalties for straying off base were severe. Soldiers who stayed out past the 11 p. m. curfew were assumed to be "seeking romance" and were subject to a dozen lashes, although this penalty was seldom applied.⁷⁻²⁴

The soldiers complained bitterly about their treatment, writing home that they were being kept in jail⁷⁻²⁵ and their discontent was strong enough for the British to be much concerned.

disloyalty arising from within is perhaps as much to be feared as sedition by foreign agents . . . considerable discontent among the men at being kept inside the camp.⁷⁻²⁶

In a force already discontented, the British exacerbated the situation further. Once again, racism triumphed over military necessity. Only Howell, the Censor who, through his daily contact with Indian letters home, and was in far closer touch with the feelings of the men, advised differently.

So far as India is concerned the exultation of a few individuals who may have had some success with white women is probably preferable to the sentiment of a whole class who feel they have done their best for the British cause and have not been altogether worthily treated . . . for the men to feel like prisoners is dangerous.⁷⁻²⁷

His advice was not taken. Then, as now, sex and reason made poor partners in debate.

The issue of cross racial sexual contact also intruded into the medical measures set up to care for the Indian sick and wounded. Soon after the Indians arrived in France and went into action, the medical services, not prepared for the large casualties, were deluged with Indian wounded. The British proposed that the major hospital for Indian wounded be established at Orleans, but as this would place too great a strain on the French railroads, the French objected, proposing instead that the wounded be evacuated to England or

Algeria.⁷⁻²⁸ As the wounded piled up in the first days of November, 1914, the War Office was forced to accept that some Indians would have to be sent to England, but their reluctance can be seen in the message sent to Surgeon-General Sloggett of the Indian Corps.

Accommodate as many Indians as you can in France.

Send surplus to England with native personnel to

look after them.⁷⁻²⁹ [author's underlining]

While it is impossible to determine precisely why the War Office did not initially want the Indian wounded in England, the possibility of sexual contact between Indians and English women may have been a factor. Certainly the following letter from Crewe to Hardinge lends support to this view.

No doubt these great halls are just the place to turn into wards, airy and easy of supervision.

In other aspects Brighton seems to me a bad place,

since even if 'Arry has to some extent enlisted,

'Arriet is all the more at a loose end and ready

to take on the Indian warrior.⁷⁻³⁰

Sir Walter Lawrence, a former Member of the Council of India, wrote in May 1915,

My one anxiety about these hospitals in England is the woman question, but so far we have not had any scandal, and I hold very strongly that the Indian soldiers, in spite of great temptations, have behaved like gentlemen. The great difficulty is with the Indian personnel of the Hospitals. We could keep the

Indian sick and wounded within the precincts of the hospitals, but it is impossible to lock up the Indian subordinates of the various hospitals. I am making perpetual inquiries, and we have a very efficient plain-clothes police system at Brighton.⁷⁻³¹

Even Howell, willing to permit Indians to contact French women, drew the line when it came to English women.

The troops in hospitals rather resent their close surveillance, but it is obviously better to keep a tight hold on them than to allow them to conceive a wrong idea of the "izzat" [honor] of English women, a sentiment which if not properly held in check would be most detrimental to the prestige and spirit of European rule in India.⁷⁻³²

The British were not only concerned with the possibility of Indian soldiers seeking sexual contact with English females, they also opposed the use of English nurses for Indian soldiers. One proposal for a mobile field hospital was criticized because of the "impossibility of Indian wounded being nursed by English ladies."⁷⁻³³ Also, at the beginning of the war, when Crewe asked for 40 nurses from India, Hardinge reminded him that while,

we could probably find the whole or a proportion of fully qualified women who are experienced in nursing natives and others in India . . . the

usual practice is not to employ women in hospitals for Indian soldiers.⁷⁻³⁴

Willcocks "strongly deprecated the employment of women in any capacity in the Indian hospitals," and Lord Crewe concurred.⁷⁻³⁵

There were, however, two exceptions. The President of the Medical Board of the India Office, Sir Havelock Charles, requested that "in St. John's Hospital it would be advantageous if female nurses could be employed," and Lord Crewe concurred provided that it was distinctly understood that "no women will be employed in menial or nursing duties with Indian troops and followers."⁷⁻³⁶ In the Lady Hardinge Hospital, established specifically for the care of Indian sick and wounded, a total of twenty nurses were employed.⁷⁻³⁷

For some reason, these exceptions made little impact on the War Office, until May 29th, 1915. On that day, the Daily Mail published a picture of an English nurse standing behind a wounded sepoy. An immediate furor resulted. According to Dr. Charles' testimony before the Medical Board, a minor officer who advised the War Office on medical matters pertaining to the Indian Army in France

condemned absolutely and totally the employment of women nurses with Indian troops and said "I told you so" and that anyone who knew anything about Indian customs would have prevented this scandal by forbidding the services of women nurses with Indian troops.⁷⁻³⁸

Actually, the photo had been taken at a hospital where white nurses were not used with Indian soldiers, and the two had been brought together only for the benefit of the photographer. This, and the fact that the officer voicing objection was "of no importance and little experience"⁷⁻³⁹ made no difference. The Army Council informed the G. O. C. of the Southern Command in England that all members of the Queen Alexandra's Imperial Nursing Service Reserve would be withdrawn from the Pavilion and York Place Hospitals in Brighton, and requested similar action be taken at the Lady Hardinge Hospital.⁷⁻⁴⁰ But at the latter the War Office hit a snag.

The Lady Hardinge Hospital was not strictly speaking a military hospital under military authority. It had been established by donations of money and property from interested persons for the care of Indian sick and wounded, and the nurses employed there were not members of the Nursing Service but civilians under contract. Further, while Sir Havelock Charles could not do anything about the other hospitals, the Army Council's precipitous action seems to have stung him into a fighting mood. He wrote to the Military Secretary of the India Office that in India Women nurses were often employed in Civil Hospitals where the immediate relations of Indian soldiers were treated, and "strongly suggested" that "the service of Women Nurses can be employed without scandal."⁷⁻⁴¹ Moreover, if the nurses were withdrawn from the Lady Hardinge Hospital, the War Office would lose their services as they were under monthly contract. He also reminded him that the

hospital itself belonged to the Indian Soldier's Fund, and while it could be commandeered, did the War Office really want the publicity that would result from such a move if the story got out?⁷⁻⁴²

The Chairman of the Indian Soldier's Fund, Sir John Hewitt, supported Charles.

. . . to the knowledge of this committee no irregularity of any kind affecting the Nursing Staff has occurred at the Hospital.

The staff of nurses at the Lady Hardinge Hospital [has] in every instance a knowledge of some vernacular of India and an appreciation of the wants of Indian patients. . . . That you [the Medical Secretary of the War Office] personally were satisfied with the selection made is evident from the fact that you asked the Committee for this Fund to allow some of the nurses now employed at the Lady Hardinge Hospital, to work at the Pavilion Hospital.

He added that the stipulation that,

the nurses should not nurse the patients in the proper sense, but only exercise a general supervision and control in the ward . . . has been strictly followed in practice.

If the nurses are withdrawn . . . the Committee would have no option but reluctantly to close the hospital.⁷⁻⁴³

Nonetheless, the War Office remained adamant, but then, so did Dr. Charles, and in this case, as later in the issue over commissioning Indians, the War Office was caught in an insoluble dilemma, how to be racist without appearing racist. Unable to state officially that the issue was one of pure racism, they could not provide a reason for their proposed action, but absolutely convinced of the rightness of their attitude, neither could they back away from their position. Had Crewe, a man who seemed to share their attitudes still been at the India Office, they might have prevailed, but Chamberlain was a different man with different ideas. As the Permanent Under-Secretary of the India Office wrote,

I am directed to remark that it is not apparent from the correspondence what are the reasons that have led to the proposal to withdraw lady nurses from the Hospitals for Indian troops . . . unless the nurses at the Lady Hardinge Hospital are urgently required for duty elsewhere, in the absence of evidence that they are open to any administrative or disciplinary objection or are disliked by the patients [they] should be left undisturbed.⁷⁻⁴⁴

The nurses stayed.

This incident is remarkable not because of the reaction of the officers at the War Office, which could have been expected, but for the fact that they felt so strongly about an issue so completely at variance with official policy that they carried their objection to Cabinet level. It took the decision

of the Secretary of State for India to decide the occupational fate of twenty nurses.

In 1917, a similar incident occurred. This time the issue was one of women physicians. The Association of Medical Women in India offered their services to the military in order to relieve men physicians so that they could go to combat theatres. They had made the same offer at the beginning of the war, but it had been refused.⁷⁻⁴⁵ The precedent of employing medical women in military hospitals had been set in England where they performed "the same duties in hospitals as" were "required of Civilian Medical men."⁷⁻⁴⁶ Interestingly, Dr. Charles, who had fought for the use of women nurses for Indian soldiers, took the opposite position when it came to women physicians, using the same arguments his opponents had used previously. "To so employ them would be detrimental to the prestige of the European female in India."⁷⁻⁴⁷ His complete about face is difficult to explain, but perhaps his statement that "It might be possible to utilize the services of a carefully selected few in Station Hospitals for European troops - in a subordinate capacity and never in command [author's underlining],"⁷⁻⁴⁸ sheds some light on his attitude. Was this a case where sexism rather than racism was the motivating force? Using women nurses, always subordinate to male physicians was one thing. Women physicians, intellectually and professionally equal, were quite another. This time however, Charles was not needed as a champion. The years of war had changed attitudes and people at the War Office, and

they accepted the offer.⁷⁻⁴⁹ The Government of India wired that "steps are being taken to engage lady doctors on the same terms as those employed in England."⁷⁻⁵⁰

In all of this, one intriguing question remains. Was the Army able to prevent sexual liaisons between Indian soldiers in France and England and the white women there? No firm answer can be given, but if venereal disease statistics are any guide, it would seem they were fairly successful. During the time Indian soldiers would have been most difficult to control, the period immediately after landing when thousands of them were in Marseilles prior to going to the front, medical officers found only six cases of VD contracted in Marseilles, compared to 48 among British troops of the Indian Corps.⁷⁻⁵¹ Considering that Indian soldiers outnumbered British by at least a factor of two, the Indians had a VD rate only 7% that of the British. Further, VD was not even listed among the categories of disease in the War Diary of the Deputy Director of Medical Services of the Indian Corps, although this may have been an administrative decision rather than an indication of the seriousness of the problem.⁷⁻⁵²

But, while the British may have viewed the woman problem with great anxiety, the purpose of the Indian infantry in France was to fight Germans. In the next few months, their ability to do this came under greater and greater question.

7. FOOTNOTES

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7-2 Secret Telegram, Kitchener to Duff, 2 June 1915, WO 33/748.

7-3 Ibid.

7-4 Secret Telegram 2862, Duff to Kitchener, 4 June 1915, WO 33/748.

7-5 General E. G. Barrow, "Military Department Minute of the Military Situation in India Consequent on the War," 6 June 1915, p. 11, CAB 37-129.

7-6 Lt-Colonel (later Major General) H. V. Lewis, Extracts from letters, p. 19, 20 June 1915, IWM 74/48/1.

7-7 Strength figures compiled from War Diaries of Lahore and Meerut Divisions, WO 95.

7-8 E. G. B. to Lt-Colonel W. B. Donnan, Indian Base Post Office, Boulogne, 9 June 1915, IOL L/MIL/7/17347.

7-9 Hardinge to Chamberlain, 10 June 1915, Chamberlain AC 62/3.

7-10 Hardinge to Willcocks, 15 June 1915, Hardinge 103/2/1373.

7-11 Chamberlain to Viceroy Army Department, #19416 820, 16 June 1915, IOL L/MIL/3/2508.

7-12 Telegram, Hardinge to Chamberlain, #21848 796, 24 June 1915, IOL L/MIL/3/2508.

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7-14 Captain W. G. Bagot-Chester, 2/3rd Gurkha Rifles, Personal War Diary, p. 42, 25 May 1915, NAM 6012/337/1.

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7-17 Secret Telegram 2862, Duff to Kitchener, 4 June 1915, WO 33/748.

7-18 Telegram, Chamberlain to Hardinge, 30 June 1915, Hardinge 103/1/1735.

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7-21 Ibid.

7-22 Robert Sidney Waters, "Diary of the Doings of the 40th Pathans in the Great War 1915," entry for 6 April 1915, NAM 7201-41-4.

7-23 Malcolm Seton, Secretary, Judicial and Public Department, India Office, 5 July 1915, IOL L/MIL/7/17517.

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7-25 Censor Report, 9 August 1915, IOL L/MIL/5/825.

7-26 Chamberlain to Governor-General in Council, 6 August 1915, Annexure 2 to Enclosure No. 1, "Note on the possibility of seditious persons tampering with the loyalty of our Indian troops at Marseilles," 16 April 1915, to Military (Secret) No. 49, IOL L/MIL/3/2168.

7-27 Censor Report, 31 July 1915, IOL L/MIL/5/825.

7-28 Secret Telegram, GHQ France to W. O., 3 November 1914, WO 33/713.

7-29 Secret Telegram 1057, Surgeon-General Sloggett to War Office, 5 November 1914, WO 33/713.

7-30 Crewe to Hardinge, 4 December 1914, Crewe, Vol. II.

7-31 Sir Walter Lawrence to Hardinge, 10 May 1915, Hardinge 103/1/1653a.

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7-33 "Precis of Proposal to form a "Mobile Field Hospital" by Dr. Pennington, Queen Street, Mayfair," Appendix 22, War Diary of Surgeon-General W. G. Macpherson; Advisor on Indian Contingent Medical Services, Vol. I, WO 95/3982.

7-34 Telegram, Hardinge to Crewe, 21 October 1914,
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of State, India Office to the Secretary, War Office, 1915,
IOL L/MIL/7/17316.

7-45 Association of Medical Women in India Southern
Circle, 26 April 1917, L/MIL/7/18419.

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8. WITHDRAWAL

The morale of the Indian soldiers continued to decline throughout July. Many felt that the British were using "black pepper" to save "red",⁸⁻¹ although analysis of casualty figures shows that this was a false impression. Generally, they also felt that Indians who had been wounded had done enough and ought not to be returned to the trenches.⁸⁻² Willcocks, conscious of the fragile morale of his troops, issued orders that recovered wounded at Marseilles would not be required to rejoin their units in the trenches unless they volunteered to do so. The order seems not to have been honored. Regimental officers, ever short of replacements, did their best to circumvent the intent of the order. Taking advantage of their knowledge of Indian culture, they phrased their question to elicit the response of "I leave it to you." Taking this as an affirmative answer, they then sent the man back to the front.⁸⁻³ In any case, Chamberlain opposed Willcocks' decision.

I have heard indirectly and privately that Willcocks issued orders in France that convalescents from the hospitals were not to be sent to the front again unless they volunteered. This seems to me quite wrong in itself and in contradiction with our

problem of keeping our Indian army there, for the present at any rate.⁸⁻⁴

Willcocks was forced to cancel the order. At the end of the month he personally visited Marseilles and had over 1400 men sent back to the front.⁸⁻⁵

The real attitude of the men at Marseilles was beyond doubt.

The men in this camp are practically all recovered sick and wounded. Their one object is, by any means, to avoid return to the front. These men undoubtedly contaminate fresh arrivals from India.⁸⁻⁶

Showing a complete lack of understanding of the causes of the problem the British took irrelevant measures to ready the recovered wounded for combat.

The normal method of getting sick fit for the firing line - i. e., that of leaving them in convalescent depots until completely recovered, has not proved successful in the case of Indian Troops. There is no doubt that Indian Troops need drill at the very earliest possible moment in order to recover their military esprit.⁸⁻⁷

For the rest of the summer, the Indian infantry saw only limited action, and, as a result, morale slowly improved. The Censor reported that,

The tone of the letters, on the whole, continues to be more cheerful than it was last winter, or

indeed in the early part of the summer. Personally I am inclined to ascribe this attitude of mind to the fact that of the men now in the field, a very large proportion of them have not tried winter conditions.⁸⁻⁸

Even he was blind to the fact that it was not winter conditions they had not tried, but actions involving heavy casualties. That was soon to change.

In September, the British armies were once again to support a French army offensive. Against the better judgment of Kitchener, French, Haig, and Rawlinson, in order to preserve allied unity and relieve the pressure on the Russians, the Imperial General Staff went along with Joffre's plan. Like all his other plans, this one too ended in achieving only a massive bloodletting.⁸⁻⁹ Fortunately for the Indians, they were asked only to launch supporting attacks to hold the German troops on their front in place.⁸⁻¹⁰ While the Indian infantry seems to have attacked with "extraordinary keenness, spirit, elan, and dash"⁸⁻¹¹ on September 25th, serious morale problems appeared even before the attacks were launched. For the first time since March, just prior to the attack and continuing after it, groups of Indian soldiers deserted to the enemy.

As in March, the deserters were mainly trans-Frontier Pathans.⁸⁻¹² Also as in March, their British officers were so completely out of touch with the attitudes of their men that their Brigade commander could write that, "Four of them are

considered to be the very last people who would desert to the enemy." 8-13 Perhaps aware that an attack was imminent, these men deserted just two days prior to it. Just after the attack, three more small groups of soldiers went over to the Germans. Among them was the first group of men not from the trans-Frontier country, three Punjabi Muslims. The staff considered the desertion of the last

. . . a matter of grave import.

Under the above circumstances, and in view of the possibility of the evil of desertion spreading to other Mahomedans, I consider it would be advisable to entirely withdraw these two battalions [40th Pathans and 129th Baluchis from whom the deserters had come]. Their employment in Africa or elsewhere where desertion to the enemy would afford no hope of their reaching their homes in India would seem to be indicated. 8-14

The British were in a dilemma as to what to do.

It is extremely undesirable that desertion should come to be looked upon as a ready method of obtaining withdrawal from the front line to a state of comparative comfort in billets. 8-15

General Keary put it best.

. . . half measures in the present situation are worse than useless. Either the men must be treated as having our full confidence or else they should be moved entirely from this theatre of operation,

and sent, not to India which they would like, nor to comfortable and easy conditions in another part of France, but to the place where they will be no gainers by the change. 8-16

But, as long as "Desertion appeared to offer the only chance of life and of a return home" 8-17 they could be expected to continue. Besides desertion, men of the 129th Baluchis also resorted to their old solution of shooting themselves in the hand, thirty men so doing. 8-18

All of this revived the question of withdrawing the Indian infantry from Europe which had been simmering since early July when Chamberlain wrote Hardinge that,

I am communicating to the Cabinet my belief that it will not be possible to retain Indian troops in France for another winter of trench warfare. 8-19

To this idea, Hardinge and Duff reacted with reservations. Whatever happened to the troops in Europe, they did not want them back in India.

He [Duff] and I [Hardinge] are both strongly of the opinion that it would be most undesirable in every way that the Indian Army Corps should return to India before the conclusion of this war. It would have the worst possible political effect. 8-20

Ever mindful that the only time that its hold on India had been seriously shaken had been during the Mutiny of the Indian Army during 1857, the Raj feared a repetition of that above all. Chamberlain cabled Hardinge,

[it is] doubtful that sufficient inducement is at present offered to the Indian officer to take strong stand necessary to deal with a movement presented in "national" garb, and that seditious propaganda finds the door at least not locked to it.⁸⁻²¹

Chamberlain however could not let the possibility of unrest in India override the results of the probable military failure of the Indian infantry battalions in Europe. On July 8th, he wrote Hardinge,

I hope before long we shall have to come to some arrangement to relieve those battalions in France which have suffered most by exchange of fresh battalions from Egypt, and I am personally disposed to think we must not attempt to keep the Indian troops in France for another winter of trench warfare. . . . Willcocks strongly pressed . . . the undesirability of asking the Indian troops to face another winter in the trenches. He did not believe they could stand it, and thought their retention might lead to a great military disaster.⁸⁻²²

Hardinge however continued to worry about the situation in India.

Although there is no cause for alarm it can hardly be denied that the general situation in India and on [the] frontiers is not as good as it was, and as war progresses it is likely to

deteriorate especially if the situation becomes critical for our arms in Europe.⁸⁻²³

As desertions had occurred in battalions in India as well as in France, Chamberlain was concerned about the Army's loyalty, and queried Hardinge,

One cannot view with complete equanimity the evidence of unrest in the different regiments, whilst the number of desertions is a serious matter on which I should like your comments. Are they due in the main to frontier unrest, or are they the result of a fear that the men may be sent to France and of a reluctance to undertake a service of the dangers of which they have received alarming accounts?⁸⁻²⁴

Byt regardless of his feelings and worries about the army's loyalty, Chamberlain remained adamant about withdrawal.

. . . real situation lies . . . in the recognition . . . that the Indian regiments of the Indian Army Corps in France are so far exhausted that it would not be safe to rely on them [or] to retain them in France for another winter . . . before the approach of winter the War Office and General Headquarters should carefully consider the desirability of removing the Indian elements of the Corps from France.⁸⁻²⁵

While the debate between Chamberlain and Hardinge continued, Willcocks suddenly changed his mind. During July, the quality of replacements improved considerably.⁸⁻²⁶ By the end of the month, he felt that

The new drafts are changing the whole aspect of the troops and if we keep on receiving as good regularly and can occasionally change units with Egypt, this Corps should do well in my opinion.⁸⁻²⁷ He wrote Hardinge that the Indians could now stay another winter.⁸⁻²⁸ Hardinge, always anxious to keep the troops in France if at all possible asked Chamberlain to change his mind.

We have accepted the scheme that you proposed for relieving some of the troops in France, but out here we feel strongly that the Indian Divisions should remain in France till the end of the war, and that they are there for better or for worse. But we are quite ready to agree to worn-out battalions being replaced by others. Moreover, if the Indian troops do not remain in France, where are you going to send them to?⁸⁻²⁹ He continued to emphasize to both Chamberlain⁸⁻³⁰ and Willcocks⁸⁻³¹ that recruiting was excellent, and that he could therefore provide replacements. Chamberlain was not impressed.

I take note of what you say about recruiting. I think that what you have accomplished is wonderful, but I am afraid that the demands on you cannot

possible [sic] become less as long as the same number of Indian regiments remain in the fighting line; the wastage of this war in all the Armies is something quite unprecedented.⁸⁻³²

Willcocks continued to oppose withdrawal, believing that the troops could take another winter. He was supported by Kitchener who was "strongly opposed to their withdrawal" and supported the scheme to trade battalions with Egypt, who also proposed sending there any men of the original contingent left.⁸⁻³³ Hardinge also continued to oppose withdrawal throughout August.⁸⁻³⁴ Chamberlain however remained firm in his desire to withdraw the Indian battalions, believing that

. . . any attempt to keep them there [France] for another winter of trench warfare should lead to a military disaster which would permanently reflect on the honour of the Indian Army.⁸⁻³⁵

He prevailed, and given the results of the battles in September on Indian morale, he was probably right.

Now that the decision to recommend to the War Cabinet that the Indian infantry should be withdrawn had been reached, the next question to be considered was where were they to be sent. Duff had already made clear his opposition to bringing them back to India, but he did want to put them somewhere where he could control them should there be serious internal unrest or trouble on the frontier.

Our responsibilities are growing and we have nothing in hand to meet them with. . . . I need most

imperatively some depot of force on which I could draw. This would be met by adopting Mr. Chamberlain's view of withdrawing our Indian infantry from France to Egypt to refit and to be there at our disposal. The cavalry might stay in France. This would still allow India to feel she had a stake in the main theatre though, as far as I can learn, cavalry in Flanders in winter have no possibility of usefulness. 8-36

Hardinge continued to insist that he did not want the troops back in India, writing to Chamberlain in September,

Now as regards the question of our troops remaining in France for the winter . . . the Commander-in-Chief and I do not want them back in India, for that would not only seriously reflect on them but would have a bad political effect in this country.

. . . The View of the Commander-in-Chief is that so long as they are kept in the field, Flanders is not the best place for Indian infantry in the winter. 8-37

In all discussions of the Indian battalions remaining in France, the weather seems to have been the deciding factor, but we have already seen that the incidents of unordered retreat, desertion, and self-inflicted wounds followed immediately after actions which involved heavy casualties, and had little if anything to do with the weather. Yet why, in the

face of this obvious condition, and of Willcocks' testimony that the Corps could face another winter, did Chamberlain, and Willcocks earlier, and Duff now, all use the weather as the major reason for withdrawing the Indian infantry? Could it be that this was the only argument which did not raise uncomfortable questions among the British of the loyalty of the Army to the Raj, or of Indian "inferiority" among Indians. The weather was a convenient explanation, probably seized upon because it would offend as few as possible.

As far as bringing the troops home to India, the British were ever more disturbed by signs of possible unrest in the battalions remaining there. To bring home units whose morale had been shattered, and whose view of the Raj had probably undergone a significant detrimental change, was seen as folly. Sir Harcourt Butler, Vice-President of the Council of India, wrote Lord Kitchener in October that,

It is clear that the native army was very much more tainted [with sedition] than any of us expected & it was very fortunate that we sent so many native troops out of India. . . . The general situation [is] likely to deteriorate the longer the war lasts. ⁸⁻³⁸

General Barrow, military Secretary of the India Office, in a report dated November 24th, was even more explicit,

I am sure we can . . . maintain internal order throughout India and Burma provided that the Indian native Army and Police remain loyal. That, however, is a proviso for which due allowance must be made.

. . . I cannot shut my eyes to facts or possible tendencies, and therefore, though the Government of India has raised no express note of warning, I feel it my duty to point out that we are getting dangerously near the border line of safety [of ratio of British to Indian troops].⁸⁻³⁹

Fortunately for all concerned, except the Indian soldiers who would have liked nothing better than to return to India, there was a place where British fortunes were even lower than in Flanders, Mesopotamia. It had the further advantages of being the responsibility of the Government of India, and having a warm climate. There, for no apparent reason except to balance failure elsewhere, a British army had attempted to capture Bagdad early in the war. Now, in October 1915, the Turks had reinforced their army, and the British commander, General Nixon, called for help.⁸⁻⁴⁰ Only Kitchener still opposed the withdrawal of the Indian battalions from France, telling Hardinge that "you know what the demands on me are and that I need every man I can get. How can you expect me to give up a division?"⁸⁻⁴¹ Chamberlain remained fixed in his decision however and informed Hardinge, who as Viceroy was responsible for the Mesopotamian campaign,

War Office contemplate transfer of the two Indian Infantry Divisions from France to Egypt with the intention of placing them at your disposal for Mesopotamia if report of General Staff is favorable

to occupation of Bagdad. But owing to uncertainty of position in the Near East and possible need for transport for other purposes they cannot guarantee date of departure. 8-42

What staff has ever turned down an offer of reinforcements?
Hardinge replied,

. . . with reinforcements of two Indian divisions from France we believe that Sir J. Nixon has a reasonable chance of being able to hold his own. . . . 8-43

On October 25th, the War Cabinet formally ratified Chamberlain's decision, and informed the Commander of the British Expeditionary Force in France, Sir John French, that six divisions, including the Meerut and Lahore divisions would be withdrawn from France for ". . . service in the East as required by the Army Council." 8-44 On October 31st, little more than a year after their arrival in France, orders were issued for the withdrawal of the Indian divisions, less their British units and their cavalry, from France.

Its units were a far cry from the proud and splendid battalions of the long service Imperial army which had been so welcomed by the French people that long year before. Its Commanders had largely been killed or relieved, including Willcocks, who had become a victim of Haig's tendency to relieve his more competent subordinates, and whose premature announcement to the Corps that they would be leaving France

had given Haig an excuse to dispense with him.⁸⁻⁴⁵ Its junior officers had largely been killed or wounded, as had the bulk of its men. Its Indian battalions had totaled approximately 220 British officers, 325 Indian officers, and 14,000 other ranks upon landing. They had suffered losses of almost 500 British officers, 500 Indian officers, and over 20,000 other ranks.⁸⁻⁴⁶ The figures speak for themselves.

There is no question that the military system of British India had proved a failure in its attempt to fight a modern war, but another question, not then asked, is did the British learn anything from the failure of the system? To judge from Edmunds, Military Operations; France and Belgium, the official history, they did not.⁸⁻⁴⁷ He blamed the withdrawal on the weather and on the difficulty of replacing heavy losses. About the weather, no more need be said. His analysis of the impact of heavy casualties upon the Indian battalions needs further inspection. He mentions four effects on the Indian units directly traceable to the casualties suffered, and which led to their withdrawal.

First, he states that battalions had become amalgamations of drafts held together by a few remaining officers and men. That was of course true, but the same could be said of any British battalion. Yet they were not withdrawn. Further, the last time Willcocks had complained of this had been in March, just after the battle of Neuve Chapelle. With replacements coming in steadily, as they had since late July, Willcocks felt that the problem had been solved, and that as long as the

quality and quantity of replacements continued, the Indian battalions could stay indefinitely. Thus, the composition of the now up to strength battalions does not explain why the units were withdrawn.

Second, Edmunds states that the strain of providing replacements was depleting the strength of Indian Army on which the defense of India rested. If this was so, then the obvious place to place the withdrawn troops would have been back in India, yet this was precisely the area where Viceroy Hardinge and Commander-in-Chief-India Duff did not want them. Finally, over the course of the rest of the war, India managed to provide almost one and a half million men for the Indian Army.⁸⁻⁴⁸ Surely the sixty thousand or so men who, based on casualty rates in Europe so far, would have been needed for the rest of the war would not have been an insupportable burden.

The third reason Edmunds gave was that the new officers provided by the Indian Army Reserve of Officers lacked experience, training, and often language skills. The lack of experience and training can be discounted, for they applied to officers of British units as well. The lack of language skills is a more serious criticism. By excluding Indians from King's Commissioned ranks, the Indian Army lost the largest source of language qualified people, but Willcocks felt as late as July 27th that the new white officers were very good, and had so informed Hardinge.⁸⁻⁴⁹ Further, the Government of

India managed to find sufficient officers for the many new battalions it raised during the rest of the war.

The final reason which Edmunds mentions does stand up to examination, that among the Indian infantry battalions, deterioration had set in. What it does not mention is that the deterioration dated from the first month of combat. Nor did it mention the cause of the deterioration. Indeed, in the turbulent political atmosphere of India after the war, it could not, but there is no doubt what the cause was according to British opinion. Indians were inferior beings. Willcocks:

. . . this war has confirmed the "immense superiority" of white regiments over our Indian troops. . . . One cannot help wishing that the Indian troops could stand the strain of modern warfare better, and yet there is compensation in the thought that British superiority is as marked as ever.⁸⁻⁵⁰

Of course, such could not be said publicly. Sir John French's "Special Order of the Day" of November 22nd directed to the Indian Corps as it left for other theatres, dredged up the old reasons of the loss of British officers, and unrelated replacements.⁸⁻⁵¹ Even Willcocks' memoirs, published after the war, forgot his analysis of August, 1915 and stated,

Had it been possible to replace our British officers and to keep up the supply of men of the quality we first brought to France, the Corps could have continued to meet any call made on it; but as

the war went on, not only did we receive all kinds and conditions of men, but the numbers dwindled until many units were skeleton formations. . . . 8-52

In point of fact, after the battles in September, the average battalion stood at 11 British officers, 15 Indian officers, and 692 other Indian ranks. This was 85% of complement of British officers, 88% of Indian officers, and 96% of other ranks. This compared very favorably with the Corps' British battalions which stood at about 26 British officers and 750 men, or 93% of complement of officers and 75% of other ranks.⁸⁻⁵³ The Indian battalions were not skeletons. Indeed, they were at almost full strength.

Whatever the postwar explanations may have been, weather, officers, or replacements, Hardinge at least had no question as to what the campaign had shown.

What I am particularly glad to hear is that this war has proved so clearly the superiority of our British over our Indian troops . . . when the Government at first refused to allow Indian troops to go to the front in Europe and I pressed so hard that they should go, I did so not only because I saw the immense political advantage to be obtained from such a step, but also because I knew that in putting the Indians against Europeans they would not be slow to recognize their own inferiority and their absolute dependence on their British officers, and that this could only be of the highest advantage

to the British Raj in India. The Indian is no fool, and you may be quite sure that he will realize, though he will never admit, the fact.⁸⁻⁵⁴

No fool indeed, but not for the reason Hardinge believed. Indian soldiers were not foolish enough to die without protest for someone else's Empire in someone else's country in a war in the outcome of which they had not the slightest interest. Understandably he proved less ardent than his British soldier brother. Today who can see the Indian soldier in a more compassionate and realistic light than did his British superiors who caused his blood to be shed so freely. We can comprehend the human condition of men so far from home and society sent to die in this kind of war. That it took so long to break him, indeed that he never broke completely, is a tribute to his courage, discipline, and honor, all of which was wasted on a British leadership who, seeing only through the ideology of paternalistic racism, never understood the basic humanity of men of different color.

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- 8-2 Censor Report, 31 July 1915, IOL L/MIL/5/825.
- 8-3 Major H. D. Vernon, assigned Indian Military Base Depot Marseilles, "Lecture," pp. 20-2, IOL MSS. Eur. D. 744/3.
- 8-4 Chamberlain to Hardinge, 2 July 1915, Chamberlain AC62/124.
- 8-5 Willcocks to Fitzgerald, 31 July 1915, PRO 30/575.
- 8-6 Chamberlain to Hardinge, "Annexure 3 to Enclosure 1
Precis of a report on Indian troops and possibilities of
sedition at Marseilles drawn up by a staff officer, General
Headquarters to Military (Secret) No. 49," 6 August 1915,
IOL L/MIL/3/3168.
- 8-7 C. F. N. M. to D. G. M. S., 13 July 1915, Appendix
1 & 2, War Diary, Assistant Director of Medical Services,
July 1915, WO 95/4039.
- 8-8 Censor Report, 25 September 1915, IOL L/MIL/5/825.
- 8-9 Liddell-Hart, First World War, pp. 193-205.
- 8-10 Merewether and Smith, p. 398.
- 8-11 N. G.-568, "report of operations by Meerut Division,"
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1915, WO 95/3931.

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8-13¹³ Major General R. G. Egerton, G.O.C. Ferozepore Brigade to Lahore Division, B. M. 287, 24 (?) September 1915, Appendix 33, War Diary General Staff Lahore Division, September 1915, WO 95/3914.

8-14¹⁴ Copy of Memo from Indian Corps to 1st Army, No. G. 843, 6 October 1915, Appendix 17, War Diary General Staff Lahore Division, October 1915, WO 95/3914.

8-15¹⁵ Lt-Colonel J. H. K. Stewert, Message G-143, General Staff to Ferozepore Brigade, 7 October 1915, Appendix 9, War Diary Lahore Division, October 1915, WO 95/3914.

8-16¹⁶ Message G. - 175, Major General H. D. Keary, G.O.C. Lahore Division to Indian Corps, 9 October 1915, Appendix 14, War Diary Lahore Division, October 1915, WO 95/3914.

8-17¹⁷ Censor Report, 6 November 1915, IOL L/MIL/5/825.

8-18¹⁸ Appendix 33, War Diary General Staff Lahore Division, 29 September 1915, WO 95/3915.

8-19¹⁹ Chamberlain to Hardinge, 2 July 1915, Chamberlain AC62/124, p. 20.

8-20²⁰ Chamberlain to Hardinge, 2 July 1915, Chamberlain AC62/6.

8-21 Chamberlain to Hardinge, 22 June 1915, Annexure 1 to Enclosure No. 1, Military (Secret) No. 49, Field Marshal French to War Office, 6 August 1915, IOL L/MIL/3/2168.

8-22 Chamberlain to Hardinge, 8 July 1915, Chamberlain AC62/125.

8-23 Private Telegram, Hardinge to Chamberlain, 11 July 1915, Chamberlain AC45/2/3.

8-24 Chamberlain to Hardinge, 30 July 1915, Chamberlain AC62/129.

8-25 Chamberlain to Hardinge, 28 July 1915, Enclosure No. 3 India Office to War Office, Military (Secret) No. 49, 6 August 1915, IOL L/MIL/3/2168.

8-26 "Report on inspection of reinforcements ex "ARONDA" by A. D. M. S.," 10 July 1915, Appendix 134, War Diary A & Q, IAC, July 1915, WO 95/1092, and Willcocks to Fitzgerald, 31 July 1915, PRO 30/57 52.

8-27 Willcocks to Fitzgerald, 31 July 1915, PRO 30/57 52.

8-28 Willcocks to Hardinge, 27 July 1915, Hardinge 103/1/1784a.

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8-34 Hardinge to Willcocks, 30 August 1915, Hardinge
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AC62/141.

8-42 Private Telegram, Chamberlain to Hardinge, 15 October 1915, Chamberlain AC45/2/6.

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8-45 Hardinge to Chamberlain, 24 September 1915, Chamberlain AC62/19.

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8-51 Field Marshal Sir John French, "Special Order of the Day," 22 November 1915, War Diary A & Q, IAC, November 1915, WO 95/1092.

8-52 Willcocks, Romance, p. 287.

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AC62/12.

9. IDEOLOGY AND ARMIES

The history of the Indian Corps in France is not only a story of military failure, but also of the inability of its leadership to respond and to correct those faults in the system which had led to the failure.⁹⁻¹ From a contemporary vantage point, the seeming incompetence of Hardinge, Crewe, Willcocks, and the rest is incomprehensible. All the facts available to us were available to them. Why could they not make use of them? But the simple answer of incompetence begs the issue. British officers and government officials of that period were no more or less competent than men of today, and to dismiss them as ignorant racists is to be trapped by the "rational actor model". This model assumes that reason transcends ideology and has an universal acultural application. Even a cursory examination of history proves this postulate erroneous. One man's reason is another's superstition. The way men think is always colored by their ideology. To understand British reactions to the activities of the Indian soldiers in France, we must first look at the role ideology played, both theoretically and specifically.

Ideology may be defined as a set of symbols which act to establish motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence which seem to explain those phenomena with which the ideology is concerned. Symbols are

sources of information, models about reality which tell the believer what he can expect when faced with certain data. The word "nigger" is a symbol, as is "black", although both may describe precisely the same person, who would be described non-symbolically as a "negro". Ideology also gives the believer a set of responses to a generalized set of stimuli. These responses, particularly when applied by a class of men, are predictable.

Ideology is distinguished from other forms of learning or conditioning by postulating a general order of existence which justifies the hoped for response. It is a way for men to place phenomena within a cognitive framework which allows them not only to deal with known events, but also to explain events with which they have had no previous experience. It gives men a particular way of looking at the world. Since it is concerned with explaining events, to be accepted, an ideology must be useful. In a very real sense, it has to work. The Flat Earth Society will not make much headway among astronauts, no matter how persuasive its proponents. An ideology is rendered intellectually sound only by conforming to the actual state of affairs. This does not mean that ideology is always correct in a scientific sense, only that it is socially functional.

However, as Mannheim has pointed out, ideology cannot be studied apart from the social group that believes in it. Therefore, before examining specifically the ideology of the

British Indian Army officer corps, we must review their social origins.

As mentioned previously, the members of the British Indian Army officer came overwhelmingly from the British middle classes, particularly from military families. From 1890-1895, slightly over 70% of officers who took commissions in the Indian Army had fathers who were military officers, while only 3% were "private gentlemen".⁹⁻² This was a sharp increase in members from military families from a half century earlier, when less than 30% of Indian Army officers had officer fathers.⁹⁻³ Even so, the class origin of the officer corps had changed hardly at all. From the beginning they had come almost exclusively from the middle classes, and this had remained so. These men wanted three things from the Indian Army; a military career that paid them enough to live on, social status, and a way of life they considered morally uplifting.

Their desire for status led them to an emulation of British upper class society, a life as close to that of England as possible. Because of this, they committed themselves to living at a level far above that which their lack of wealth and high birth would have permitted at home. In India however, this was possible. Servants were cheap and plentiful, and prices, except for imported English goods, low. But it would be a great error to presume that because the pretentious British officer desired quasi-aristocratic status, he

also wanted a dissolute life. In fact, he wanted just the opposite.

The Victorian Age was one of great concern with morality in which duty was a central theme, and suffering and hard work the path to goodness. The demands made on the officer were far less than those made on members of the Indian Civil Service, but they both shared the demands of the distance from home, the climate, and above all, the necessity of living within what they both perceived as a morally unfit society. This gave an air of noble suffering to what, for the average Indian Army officer, was an easy comfortable life.

British India wrapped up these desires in a set of ideological principles which reinforced and justified them. Of particular importance to the officer corps were the ideas of racism, sexism, and conventionality. In the military context, racism was the most important. By the end of the 19th century, technology had made Europe and its white population the undisputed master of the world, and Social Darwinism had given that domination intellectual justification. The British officer's beliefs about India were based on a general conception of race which, simply put, postulated that white men were inherently better than Indians. Into this general conception, he fit various symbols, "nigger", "clerky-werky", "martial races", which justified his essentially parasitic role. He believed he held his position because he was ordained by his breeding to do so. That place would last forever, since natural biological superiority could not be passed on to the

Indians. To question his innate superiority over the Indian was also to question his privileged status.

Sexism was of less importance than racism, but still figured highly into his belief structure. The British attitude toward white women resident in India was a modification of that prevailing in middle class circles in England. While a significant loosening of standards was well under way in Britain by the beginning of World War I, it had yet to make a major impact in India. Victorian prudery has become proverbial, and the term "Victorian" even today calls forth an image of sexual repression. The roots of this attitude toward sex lay in the Evangelical movement of the first part of the 19th century. Women were divided into "good" women, who had no taste for sexual activity, and "bad" women who did. For several reasons, this idea was more important to the British Indian officer than to most others. First, he was away from his wife for long periods and it was comforting to know that since she didn't desire sex, he could be at ease regarding her fidelity. Second, racism seems always to serve as a vehicle by which the repressed sexual desires of the dominant class are projected on the subordinate race. Indians were assumed to lust after British women. This, coupled with a fear of sexual inadequacy instilled by Victorian child rearing patterns, made the separation of white women from Indians absolutely essential for psychological security.

Finally, the British officer suffered from the illusion that proper conduct on his part would impress Indians. The

British believed they held India by virtue of their innate superiority. They further assumed that if they exhibited this superiority to Indians, the Indians could not fail to be impressed by it, and accept the justice of British rule. They therefore felt themselves, male or female, always on display. Incredibly ethnocentric, the British officer defined good conduct by the standards of middle class Britain. Women resident in India were expected to uphold the same ideals. Since the British were horrified by the very idea of cross-racial sexual contact, they assumed that should it occur, it might help destroy their moral hold on the Indian masses. Indeed, any lapse from the conduct expected of the British middle class was looked upon as a threat to the Empire. Adjustments to the climate and to the culture were made reluctantly if at all. The phrase "only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the noonday sun" was only too true. It didn't work. Indians were far more puzzled than impressed.

Beyond these basic ideological factors, the personality of the average British Indian officer must also be considered. The phrase, "the military mind", has become a catchword, and to apply it simplistically to all soldiers is wrong. Nonetheless, the British officer of this period probably fit a certain personality type. Military organizations, because of their requirements for teamwork, aggression, order, and obedience, tend to attract people who value those traits. Such people use the certainties and rituals of military life as a way to deal with internal fears. Any threat to these

certainties activates repressed fears and results in an increased defense of the certainties, including ideological ones. This is not to say that the officer corps of the British Indian Army consisted of neurotics, but it does assume that the type of person attracted to military life was conventional in outlook and neither valued or exhibited an open mind.

The structure of the Indian infantry regiment embodied all of the above factors; racism, sexism, and conventionality. It was recruited and officered on racist lines. A rigid hierarchy of so called martial races determined who would be recruited, and all white officers outranked all Indians. While a white officer would never have referred to his own men as "niggers", he regularly used the term when referring to other Indians. Even his men, martial though they might be, and therefore superior to the average Indian, were always considered to be inferiors. Granted, this racism was paternalistic, and the officer generally treated his men well, provided they kept their place.

The male dominated character of the military and the resultant sexism was also a feature of the Indian regiment. Officers were expected to marry late, the rule being, "Lieutenants should not marry, Captains may marry, Majors must marry." This belief extended the time a young officer remained in a totally male society to the middle thirties. This life style was made bearable by the institution of the "Mess", which, except for guest nights was a male preserve from which even wives were excluded. It extended well into adulthood the

atmosphere of the public school in which the average British officer had spent his adolescence. Even after marriage, the officer was expected to put the regiment and army above family, and the wife's position in army society was that of an appendage of her husband.

Finally, the regiment demanded that the young officer "fit in". In practice, this meant that he was expected, insofar as possible, to pattern himself on his brother officers. As already mentioned, for him to express an opinion which differed from the general view was frowned upon.

All of these factors contributed to the failure of the Indian infantry in France. The system of martial race recruiting brought into the army men whose backgrounds, attitudes, and expectations made them a poor choice to fight a modern war. The exclusion from military service of educated classes of Indians meant that those best suited for modern war could not be taken, and that officers would have to be white. The officer shortage became a never ending problem. Most important however, was that racism created an insurmountable barrier to understanding. Because it provided the British officer a conventional explanation for the military failure of the Indian infantry regiments, he was unable to examine critically the real causes of that failure. Racism linked with sexism often dictated actions which made the problems even worse. In a situation in which morale was crucial and failing, Indian soldiers were prohibited the normal freedoms of off duty soldiers because that would have permitted sexual

contact with white women. Even contact with white hospital nurses by the wounded was a cause of great concern.

Simply to state that the British officer was blinded by his ideology does not get to the heart of the question which is why he seemed unable to change it. If ideology is learned, surely it can be unlearned. Unfortunately, ideology is one of the most difficult areas of a person's knowledge to change. Even assuming that a British officer had been confronted with an alternative to racism and sexism, there were many reasons for him to reject it.

First, ideology forms a screen by which men filter and sort innovation. For an innovation, and a new ideology is as much an innovation as a new weapon, to be accepted, it has to be perceived as compatible with accepted social values. Obviously, racial equality was not an idea which fit easily into a British officer's world. A second obstacle to the acceptance of innovation is the vested interest of the dominant group. The Indian Army officer corps was a white, male group whose position in the social structure of India depended on the continuation of a system which excluded Indians from positions of authority. Further, an officer's dominance in his home depended on keeping women in their place as well. The British officer was, and had to be, a conservative, one whose "world view . . . rationalizes, expresses, and supports the existing socio-cultural system with which [he was] content."⁹⁻⁴ Changing the Indian Army might have contributed to winning the war, but such changes would have destroyed the

comfortable, privileged universe that the British officer hoped to return to after the war was over.

There were other more individual reasons which mitigated against the acceptance of a new ideology. Since the officer corps as a whole saw Indians and women as inferiors, an individual officer risked abandonment by his own peers should he put forth a view of racial or sexual equality. Peer pressure against such a move must have been immense. Finally, we ought not overlook the role of the conventional personality type in all of this. British officers were neither trained nor expected to exhibit innovation, particularly those in the Indian Army, so we should not be surprised that they did not.

All of what has been said so far does much to explain the failure of the Indian infantry in France in 1914-1915, but even more important, the glimmerings of a model can be deduced from these events. The Indian Army was not the only army to have an ideology. All armies have them, sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit, but always there. Examination of any military force will unearth a set of conceptions and symbols which explain phenomena to the leadership and provide a guide to action in the face of new phenomena. In the British Indian Army, the dominant principle was racism. Other armies have different sets of conceptions. The American Army in this century has had a set of conceptions about war which have led its leaders to view war as an engineering problem. Its solution to problems has been pragmatic and technological, even when, as in Vietnam, that approach was clearly ineffectual.

An army does not extract its ideology out of thin air. It is always a part of a larger society and its ideology is rooted in it. Innovation by an army without similar innovation in its larger society is therefore difficult. Nonetheless, innovation is possible. Armies are always changing something. The question is what kind of innovations can be accommodated. The answer to this question lies in two areas, the nature of the civilian and military leadership (assuming a dichotomy between the two) and the broader situation.

In most societies, civilian and military leaders are drawn from the same class, and both therefore tend to have the same "weltanschaaung". However, as each reaches the upper echelons of their respective fields, differences in the selection process make themselves felt. In most civilian occupations, there is a built in check on incompetence, such as profits on businessmen, voters on politicians, and malpractice suits on physicians. Generals are different. They are made by other generals, and since societies are usually at peace for longer periods than they are at war, an officer may attain high rank without ever having been tested at his trade. A man may become a general and command armies without ever having led anything larger than a company in combat, if he has seen combat at all. Since an officer's rise in peacetime depends not on performance in battle, but on the opinion of superiors, and since those superiors tend to be conventional personality types for reasons already mentioned, any innovative bent he once may have had is usually suppressed (the Pattons are the

exception and rise only in wartime when a premium is placed on performance).

Thus, like the men who promoted them in the first place, generals tend to be conventional and dislike innovation. They have the further understandable reluctance to make major changes in a system which has proved its worth by promoting them to high places. The impetus for major change normally comes from outside the army rather than from within. It was the First Lord of the Admiralty, Winston Churchill, who pushed development of the tank, while Haig fought to retain horse cavalry. The army is not the only service to oppose innovation. The American Navy fought the principle of the aircraft carrier so hard that the term "battleship admiral" has come to represent blind rejection of innovation. Even today, the U. S. Air Force continues its quest for another manned bomber long after most military experts have discarded the concept.

Civilian leadership is often assumed to be more open to innovation. Not being bound by the military mind set, they often are willing to accept certain technological innovations before the military, but civilian leadership is not a panacea. Competent civilians are better than incompetent generals, but there is no guarantee that civilian politicians elected on the basis of their voter appeal, or appointed because of their politicking in the party structure in a totalitarian system will be any better than generals at making military decisions. Coming from the same class as the generals, they are bound by the same value system and are prone to follow the same logic

and hold the same preconceptions as the military. Chamberlain never abandoned the theory of martial races, and Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, and the "whiz kids", for all their computers, never realized the absurdity of saturation bombing in a guerrilla war.

The two factors of general situation and the nature of the leadership on which innovation is dependent can be categorized into three scenerios. In the first, as in the early days of World War I in Great Britain, the social structure remains stable and confidence in the military is high. The military and civilian leadership is still drawn from the same class and shares the same values. In this case, the civilian leadership usually defers to the military regarding military decisions, and will value their advice highly in areas which bear on military operations. Here, only incremental innovation is possible, and then only when it cannot be avoided. Barring the unlikely rise of a military genius to high command, the conservative, conventional generals will dominate. This was the situation when the Indian infantry fought in France.

The second scenerio is when the social structure remains stable, but military influence, power, and prestige has dropped. Here the civilian leadership may be willing and able to play a larger role. If, like Lincoln, they restrain themselves and concentrate on selecting innovative generals, all is well. Unfortunately, they are sometimes prone to assume that because one group of generals has failed, all are suspect,

and begin making military decisions themselves. The result is likely to be disaster. Still drawn from the same class as the generals, they share the same preconceptions, but lack their expertise. Mesopotamia and Salonika in World War I were both civilian inspired operations, as was much of the Vietnam war.

The third scenerio is when the social structure has become unstable bringing to power men drawn from a different class than that of the generals. In this case, the new leaders are not bound by the same symbols and conceptions as the traditional military. They may initiate new and innovative military policies and techniques, such as Hitler's nurturing of tank warfare and air power. They may completely restructure the army as did Trotsky and Carnot. However, mesmerized by their success, they may also overreach themselves, ignore more conventional military advice, and eventually fail, as did Napoleon and Hitler.

If any lessons can be drawn from the failure of the Indian infantry in France, and the models above, they are these. First, civilian leaders of a stable society should confine themselves to picking the right generals, remembering that those recommended by other generals are probably conventional and conservative. Whatever the temptation, they should not try to run military operations themselves. Second, neither civilian or military leaders should ever involve their army in a war which calls for innovation beyond the limits of their ideology, nor should they attempt to build an army out of step

with the social structure of the larger society, for it will inevitably be of doubtful efficiency. The Arabs have consistently attempted to build modern mechanized forces on the base of a peasant society. Not surprisingly they have proved consistently inferior to the Israeli Army, also a modern mechanized force, but based on a modern industrial society. Nor is it surprising that the American Army was unable to beat the Vietnamese in a guerrilla war. In both cases, the losing side was playing the winner's game.

Crewe, Hardinge, Chamberlain, Willcocks, and the rest should not be blamed for the failure of the Indian infantry in France during that long first year of World War I. Even if they had not been blinded by their ideology and had seen the problems clearly, corrections could not have been made. As long as the Indian battalions were recruited from an illiterate peasantry, and organized and led on racist lines, they could not have been much better than they were. To make them better, the entire ideological structure by which the British justified and ruled their Indian Empire would have to have been discarded. To have asked these men, whose entire careers had been dependent on this structure, and who had been promoted to high position by it, to change the system was to ask too much of them. Major changes are not made by men such as these, but by men who value innovation, not convention and conservatism. They are certainly not initiated in the Officer's Mess.

9-1 Responsibility for the ideas expressed in this chapter lies solely with me, however the works of several authors have been of particular importance in influencing me. I am indebted to Clifford Geertz for his essay, "Religion as a Cultural System," published in his book, The Interpretation of Cultures (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1973), pp. 87-125, which helped shape my thoughts on the role of ideology in military organizations. As to why ideology is so difficult to unlearn, Anthony F. C. Wallace's chapter, "The Psychology of Culture Change" in his book, Culture and Personality (New York: Random House, 1961), pp. 120-63, was most helpful. I relied heavily on Francis G. Hutchins' book, The Illusion of Permanence (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 20-52 and 101-118, for his masterly description of what the British in India believed about the country and the people, and what they expected from their service there. Finally, Norman Dixon's analysis of the personality type of the typical military officer in his book, On the Psychology of Military Incompetence (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976) was of great assistance.

9-2 Heathcote, p. 142.

9-3 Ibid., p. 123.

9-4 Anthony F. C. Wallace, Culture and Personality (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 131.

STRENGTH OF INDIAN INFANTRY REGIMENTS*

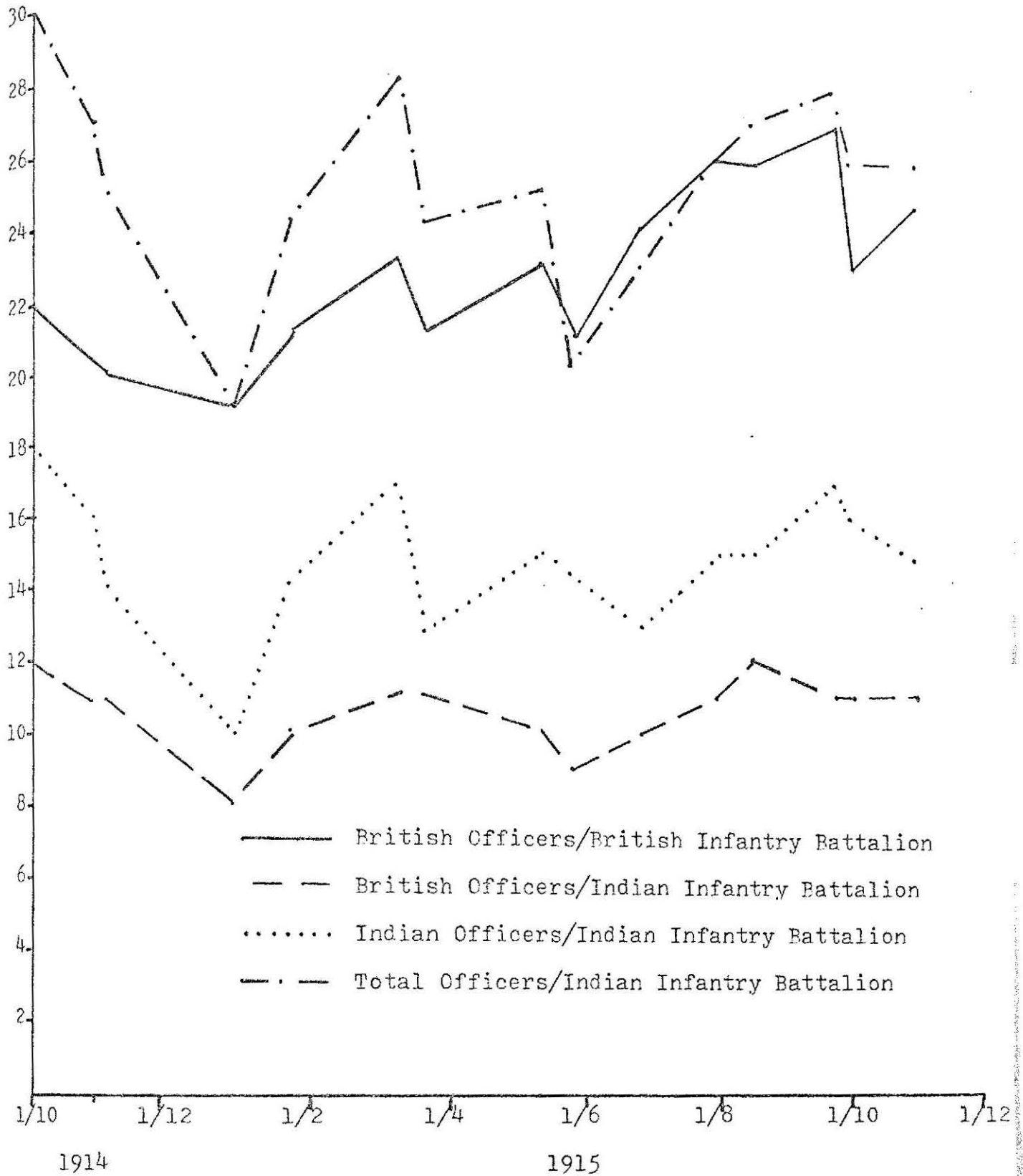
BO = British Officers
 IO = Indian Officers
 TO = Total Officers
 IOR = Indian Other Ranks

DATE	Strength					Strength as % of Complement [†]				
	BO	IO	TO	IOR	TOTAL	BO	IO	TO	IOR	TOTAL
1 Oct 14	12	18	30	764	794	92	105	100	106	106
30 Oct 14	11	16	27	669	696	86	93	90	93	93
4 Nov 14	11	14	25	560	585	83	83	83	78	78
29 Dec 14	8	11	19	470	489	63	65	63	65	65
21 Jan 15	10	14	24	575	599	76	83	80	80	80
6 Mar 15	11	17	28	688	716	83	100	93	96	95
20 Mar 15	11	13	24	621	645	83	77	80	86	86
10 May 15	10	15	25	555	580	75	89	83	77	77
22 May 15	9	10	20	473	493	72	61	66	66	66
26 Jun 15	10	13	23	514	537	77	76	77	71	72
31 Jul 15	11	15	26	609	635	85	87	86	85	85
14 Aug 15	12	15	27	659	686	89	90	89	92	91
25 Sep 15	11	17	28	720	748	88	100	94	100	100
2 Oct 15	11	16	26	677	703	81	89	86	94	94
30 Oct 15	11	15	26	692	718	86	88	87	96	96

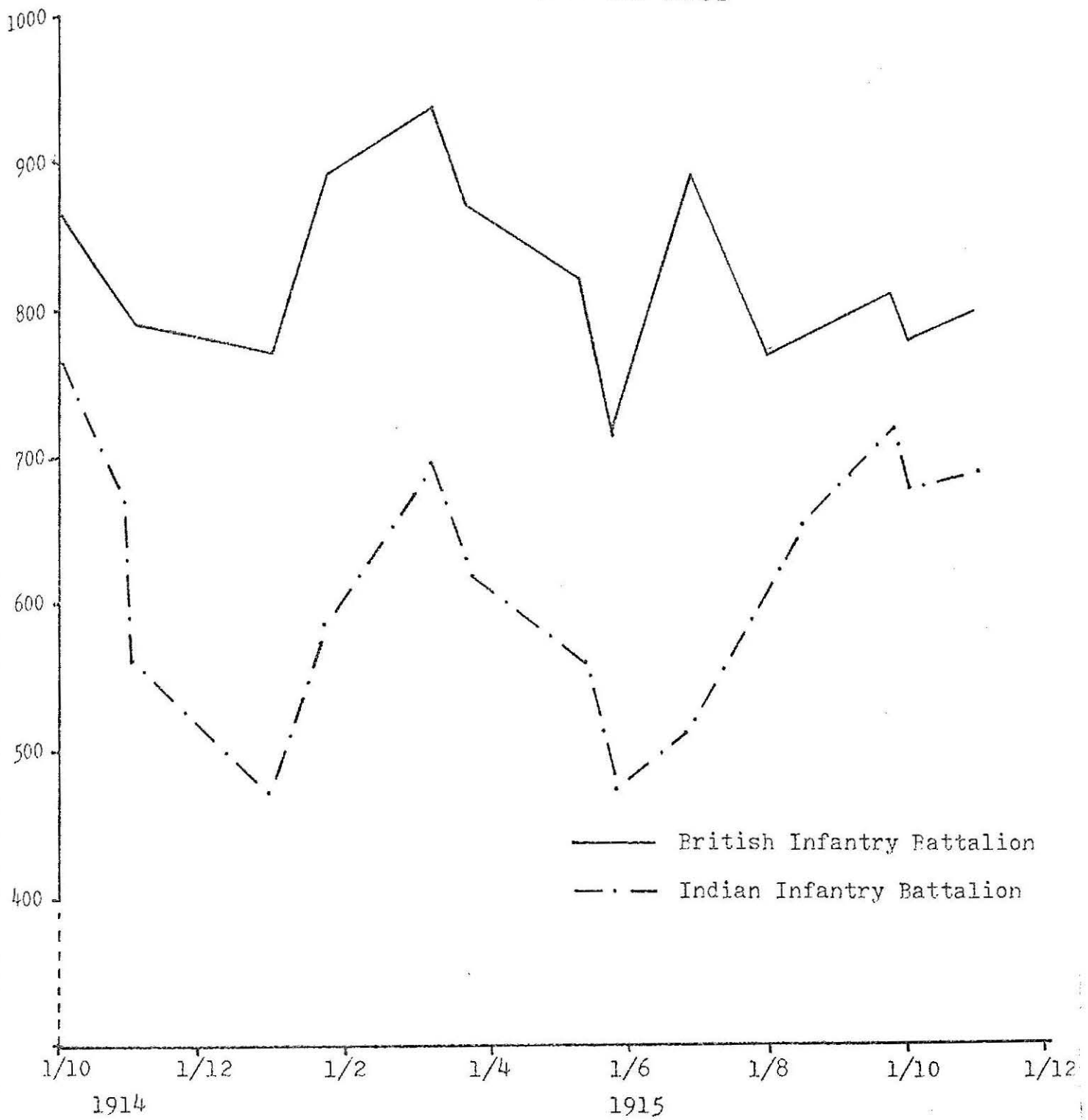
* Figures compiled from the War Diaries of the Lahore and Meerut Divisions, WO 95.

† Complement at full strength 13 British Officers, 17 Indian Officers, 720 Other Ranks.

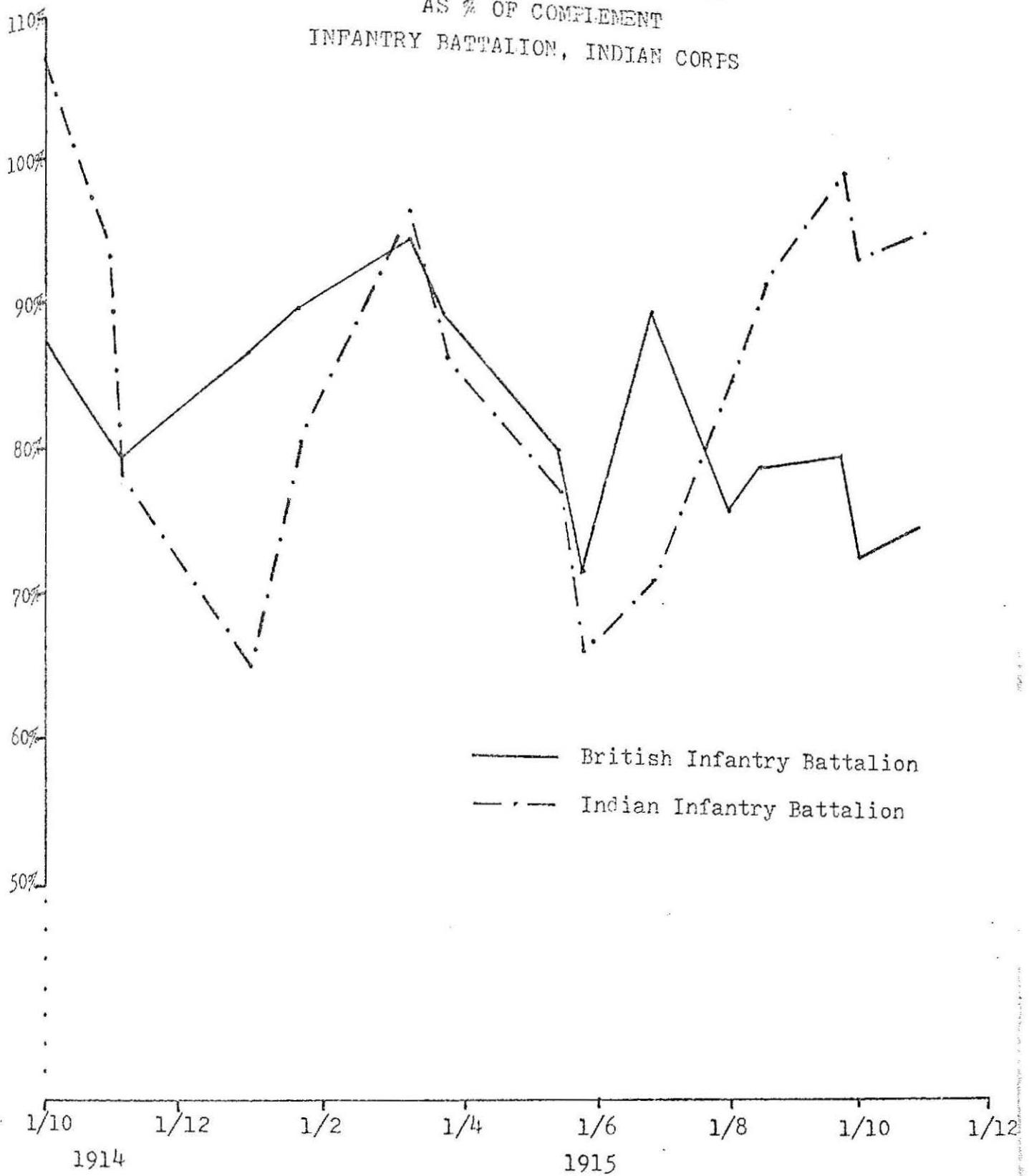
AVERAGE STRENGTH, OFFICERS
 INFANTRY BATTALION, INDIAN CORPS



AVERAGE STRENGTH, OTHER RANKS
INFANTRY BATTALION, INDIAN CORPS



AVERAGE STRENGTH, OTHER RANKS
AS % OF COMPLEMENT
INFANTRY BATTALION, INDIAN CORPS



BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Despite all the interest in the Indian Army of British Imperial India, there is a dearth of solid historical material on the subject. The most recent work is T. A. Heathcote's The Indian Army, The Garrison of British Imperial India, 1822-1922 (London: David & Charles, 1974) which is by far the best. It suffers only from brevity as it attempts to cover a hundred years in less than 200 pages. Stephen P. Cohen's The Indian Army, Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1971) is also too short to do justice to its subject, but it is the only book to relate the Indian Army to the nationalist movement of the post-World War I period and to the army of free India. As such, it is essential. Phillip Mason's A Matter of Honour (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974) is disappointing. It is much longer than the other two, but it makes no attempt to examine critically the Indian Army. It is little more than panegyric.

The two books that deal specifically with the Indian Corps in France are the book by the official historians of the Corps, Lt-Colonel J. W. B. Merewether and Sir Frederick Smith, The Indian Corps in France (London: John Murray, 1917) and that by the Corps' commander, General James Willcocks, With the Indians in France (London: Constable and Company, 1920). Both

are little more than lists of heroic events performed by units and individuals of the Corps, although Merewether and Smith at least provide a basic chronology of who did what when.

Neither however, is in any sense, a critical examination of the Corps. The official history of the British Expeditionary Force is by Brigadier General Sir James E. Edmonds, Military Operations: France and Belgium (London: Macmillan, Vol. I, 1922, revised 1933; Vol. II, 1925; Vol. III, 1927). It gives little information about the Indians, and the Indian Government's work, India's Contribution to the Great War (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1923) provides scant information on the Indians in France.

Articles on the Indian Army, unlike books, are many and it would be impossible to list even a representative sample here. Anyone wishing a guide to them should consult Margaret H. Case's South Asian History 1750-1950, A Guide to Periodicals, Dissertations, and Newspapers (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968). Even so, there are very few on the Indians in France.

Since the books and articles on the Indian infantry in France are few, this dissertation has relied primarily on documentary sources. Major repositories in Great Britain are as follows. The largest is the Public Record Office. Its holdings which relate to the Indian Corps in France are the Cabinet Records, the minutes of the Committee of Imperial Defense, the War Office files, and the War Diaries of the various units which fought with the Corps in France. The

India Office Library has some material in its L/MIL files, although this material is not indexed or bound. The most lucrative source of information lies in the Cambridge University Library where is kept the printed, bound, and indexed Hardinge and Crewe papers. Another archive is at the University of Birmingham where the Austin Chamberlain papers are located. A few diaries of serving soldiers can be found at the National Army Museum, and the Imperial War Museum. Finally, the best collection of printed books is at the British Museum.

THE IMPERIAL RESERVE
The Indian Infantry on the Western Front, 1914-15

by

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M. P. A., Cornell University, 1968
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The British governed India with both regular British army units, and units of the British Indian Army. Its units were composed of Indian soldiers, noncommissioned officers, and officers, and of British officers, the most junior of which outranked the most senior Indian. The British officers were class conscious, conservative, and badly trained for European war. Further they were racist to the core, believing that they held their privileged positions because they were inherently better than Indians. The Indians who served in the army were selected by the British from castes the British considered "martial". Only 24 castes and groups out of the hundreds of India were deemed martial enough for service in the infantry. These groups were also the most politically backward and poorly educated in India.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Indian Army had three missions; to uphold British authority in India, to repel tribal incursions and unrest on the border areas, and to prepare to defend India from a Russian invasion. However, in the first decade of the century, Great Britain and Russia affected a rapprochement, and the Imperial General Staff in London began to consider the use of Indian troops outside India in case of war with Germany. By the outbreak of war, the British Cabinet, the Imperial General Staff, the Army Council, the Government of India, and the Indian Army had all agreed in

principle that the Indian Army would be used outside of India, but no detailed planning was available to support such use.

When the original British Expeditionary Force suffered its initial defeats in France, the Cabinet decided to send to France the only trained reinforcements available in the Empire, the two divisions of the Indian Army not needed in India. These two divisions, the Lahore and Meerut, were directed to France, but delays in sailing and the necessity of reequipping them for European war prevented their commitment to combat until late October.

From almost its initial commitment, the Indian infantry battalions proved a failure in combat. Morale of the Indian soldiers deteriorated rapidly, and instances of self-inflicted wounds, malingering, hesitancy to attack, unordered retreats, and even desertion to the enemy appeared. The British experienced great difficulties in replacing casualties, particularly British officers, without whom the Indian units fought badly. By Spring of 1915, the British government was considering withdrawal of the Indian infantry battalions, stayed only by the possible effect of Indian popular opinion, and the desperate need for troops on the Western Front. Nonetheless, by early August, Austin Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for India had recommended to the Cabinet that the Indian infantry be withdrawn. On October 31st, orders were issued for their transfer to other theatres.

The failure of the Indian infantry in France can largely be traced to the racist ideology around which the Indian Army

was organized, and to the character of the conventional British officers who led it. The ideology of the "martial races" meant that only illiterate peasants could be recruited for the army, men unsuited for the complexities of modern war, and for promotion to staff positions. Thus the officers had to be white Britishers who knew Indian languages, men always in short supply. Further, the higher officers of the Indian army had been selected and promoted by a system which discouraged innovation and encouraged conventionality. Already blinded by racism, these men could not perceive the real faults of the system, for they owed their high positions to its workings. As a result, they accepted the Indian's failure as inevitable rather than seeking change.