

EDITED BY  
ALAN JEFFREYS  
AND PATRICK ROSE



# THE INDIAN ARMY, 1939–47

Experience and Development



# THE INDIAN ARMY, 1939-47



Frontispiece: Kundah Singh (inside turret) and Risalder Dalipsingh, crew members of a Sherman tank of the Scinde Horse, part of the Indian 31st Armoured Division in Iraq, March 1944. Photo courtesy of the Imperial War Museum, London [IWM: K 6697].

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Experience and Development

*Edited by*

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*Warfare* (Sussex Academic Press, 2010), *Illustrating Empire: A Visual History of British Imperialism* (with David Tomkins) (Bodleian Library, 2011), and *Churchill* (Quercus, 2011).

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**Tim Moreman** is a freelance writer and academic. For several years he lectured in the Department of War Studies at King's College London, from where he obtained his PhD. He also held a six-month appointment as Resident Historian

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**Ashok Nath** is the author of *Izzat-Historical Records and Iconography of Indian Cavalry Regiments, 1750–2007* (2009) the definitive work on the subject. He served as an officer in the Indian Army, ran a full time specialist mountain travel exploration company in Sweden and taught and researched at Södertörns and Stockholm University. He is a former senior research fellow with the United Service Institution of India and currently on a sabbatical in Dhaka, Bangladesh engaged in counter terrorism and radicalisation issues and writing a history of the South Asian armies.

**David Omissi** is Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Hull. He gained his doctorate in the Department of War Studies at King's College, London, before becoming a Prize Research Fellow at Nuffield College, Oxford. His publications include "A Most Arduous but a Most Noble Duty": Gladstone and the British Raj in India, 1868–98' in M.E. Daly and K.T. Hoppen (eds), *Gladstone: Ireland and Beyond* (Dublin, 2011) and 'Europe Through Indian Eyes: Indian Soldiers Encounter England and France, 1914–1918', *English Historical Review*, 122/496 (2007).

**Patrick Rose** received a PhD in War Studies from King's College London for a thesis examining command culture in the British and Indian Armies between 1919 and 1945. He is a West Point Fellow in military history, and co-editor and contributing author of the forthcoming book *Allied Fighting Effectiveness in North Africa and Italy, 1942–1945*. He is currently a senior analyst in the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory of the UK Ministry of Defence, and has twice deployed to support NATO campaign planning in Afghanistan.

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# Foreword

Field Marshal Sir John Chapple

The conference held on 9 May 2009 at the Imperial War Museum covered many aspects of the Indian Army in the run-up to the Second World War; through that war; and then in the hectic period up to Independence and Partition. It is a period not all that well understood and about which much historical research continues and continues to be needed. The dramatic events of war, the speed of events up to 1947 and the large number of changes of those in official appointments during this period, will all have affected the ability to record decisions and events in the same thorough and detailed manner which was normal in more peaceful times in India. Thus there is much still to be uncovered and assessed.

The Indian Army expanded to become the largest volunteer army in the world during the first half of the war. It was not particularly well prepared or equipped for this conflict. Then at the end of hostilities, having risen to the challenges, it faced a massive draw down in numbers; whilst at the same time facing the run-up towards Independence and the possibility of Partition. There are many aspects of this period which have not yet been subjected to historical analysis and assessment.

The seminar brought together many who have thrown light on this particularly interesting and important period of the history of the Indian Army. I thank them all for their contributions and also thank the Imperial War Museum and King's College London for organising this valuable event.

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# Introduction

This volume is the result of an international conference held at the Imperial War Museum, London, in May 2009. It was jointly organised by the Museum and King's College London, a collaboration that attracted a wide range of participants considering various aspects of a subject that fascinates the serious academic and general military history reader alike. Comprising a collection of new perspectives on the experience and development of the Indian Army in the era of the Second World War, it is hoped this volume will encourage further research into the subject as well as prove an enjoyable and informative read to those interested in the conduct of the Second World War and subsequent Partition of India.

A number of academic studies have added to the growing literature on the Indian Army published in recent years, including Kaushik Roy's *The Oxford Companion to Modern Warfare in India* and *A Military History of India and South Asia* edited by Daniel Marston and Chandar Sundaram.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, the history and experience of the Indian Army during the Second World War and the years immediately after, leading to and encompassing the Partition of India, remains a vast area of study that has received comparatively little scholarly attention relative to its scope and importance. One earlier volume, *The British Raj and its Indian Armed Forces 1857–1939*, edited by the Indian scholars Partha Sarathi Gupta and Anirudh Deshpande, only takes its discussion as far as 1939; its companion, originally intended to cover the subsequent period until 1947, *War and Society in Colonial India*, edited by Kaushik Roy, in fact re-covers much of the same period with a focus from 1807 until 1945.<sup>2</sup> Many of the chapters had already appeared elsewhere and only three dealt explicitly with the Second World War.<sup>3</sup> A further edited work, *The Indian Army in both World Wars*, published by

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<sup>1</sup> See Kaushik Roy, *The Oxford Companion to Modern Warfare in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009). See also Daniel Marston and Chandar Sundaram (eds), *A Military History of India and South Asia* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> See Partha Sarathi Gupta and Anirudh Deshpande (eds), *The British Raj and its Indian Armed Forces 1857–1939* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002) and Kaushik Roy (ed.), *War and Society in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> See Chandar Sundaram, 'Seditious Letters and Steel Helmets: Disaffection among Indian Troops in Singapore and Hong Kong, 1940–1, and the formation of the Indian National Army'; Raymond Callahan, 'Were the 'Sepoy Generals' Any Good? A Reappraisal

Brill in 2011 and also edited by Kashik Roy, had five of its 12 chapters dedicated to the Second World War, the authors of which also contribute to this volume on different subjects.<sup>4</sup> Roy himself has authored three recent articles covering the expansion, deployment, morale and loyalty of the Indian Army during the war.<sup>5</sup> Alongside Tarak Barkawi's article examining culture and combat in the Fourteenth Army, and the works of Raymond Callahan, Graham Dunlop, Daniel Marston and Tim Moreman (all of whom contribute to this volume), this comprises the recent historiography of the Indian Army in that conflict.<sup>6</sup>

The Indian Army's experience in the era of the Second World War thus remains a fertile ground for historical inquiry, and even less attention has been placed on the ensuing period of Partition.<sup>7</sup> Outside the studies outlined above, the Indian Army during this period has remained largely untouched since the

of the British-Indian Army's High Command in the Second World War' and Indivar Kamtekar, 'The Shiver of 1942' (originally published in *Studies in History*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2002) all in Roy, *War and Society*, pp. 126–60, 305–57.

<sup>4</sup> See Raymond Callahan, 'The Prime Minister and the Indian Army's Last War'; Alan Jeffreys, 'The Officer Corps and the Training of the Indian Army with Special Reference to Lieutenant-General Sir Francis Tuker'; Rob Johnson, 'The Indian Army and Internal Security 1919–1946'; Daniel Marston, 'The War in Burma: The 7/10th Baluch Experience' and Tim Moreman, 'From the Desert Sands to the Burmese Jungle: The Indian Army and the Lessons of North Africa, September 1939–November 1942' in Kaushik Roy, *Indian Army in both World Wars* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 223–331, 359–90.

<sup>5</sup> See Kaushik Roy, 'Expansion and Deployment of the Indian Army during World War II: 1939–45', *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, Vol. 88, No. 355 (Autumn 2010), pp. 248–68; 'Discipline and Morale of the African, British and Indian Army units in Burma and India during World War II: July 1943 to August 1945', *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 6 (April 2010), pp. 1255–82 and 'Military Loyalty in the Colonial Context: A Case Study of the Indian Army during World War II', *Journal of Military History*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (April, 2009), pp. 497–529.

<sup>6</sup> See Tarak Barkawi, 'Culture and Combat in the Colonies: The Indian Army in the Second World War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (April 2006), pp. 325–55; T.R. Moreman, *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare, 1849–1947* (Frank Cass, 1998); D.P. Marston, *Phoenix From the Ashes: The Indian Army in the Burma Campaign* (Westport, Praeger, 2003); R. Callahan, *Churchill and His Generals* (Kansas University Press, 2007) and Graham Dunlop, *Military Economics, Culture and Logistics in the Burma Campaign, 1941–1945* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009). In addition, although not an academic publication, Chris Kempton, *Loyalty & Honour: The Indian Army: September 1939–August 1947* Parts I–III (Milton Keynes: The Military Press, 2003) is an extremely useful reference work for the period that warrants mention.

<sup>7</sup> See Daniel Marston, 'The Indian Army, Partition and the Punjab Boundary Force', *War in History*, Vol. 16 (2009), pp. 469–505 and his tentatively titled *Rock in an Angry Sea: The Indian Army and the End of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

first volume of Compton Mackenzie's unfinished history of the Indian Army, *Eastern Epic*, Major General Elliott's *A Roll of Honour*, and the volumes of the Indian Armed Forces official history published in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>8</sup> A modern, inclusive historical interpretation of the Indian Army in the period 1939–47 is thus long overdue. This volume goes some way towards this goal and highlights the new research being undertaken in this field.

Ashley Jackson's opening essay is a useful introductory chapter placing the Indian Army in the global context of British colonial and Commonwealth forces ranging from early imperial military units to those still in existence in Africa, India and other former parts of the empire.<sup>9</sup> He looks at fighting units, volunteers, labour corps and noncombatants and examines the recruitment, expansion, organisation, development and martial races theory that underpinned these formations. For example, the Iraq Levies and the Calcutta Light Horse are examined showing the vast resources of the Army in India both before and during the Second World War, along with wider coverage of the regular forces of the Indian Army, the Auxiliary Force, India (the equivalent of the British Territorial Army), the Indian Army Reserve and the Indian State Forces. Their contribution to the maintenance of the empire during the Second World War is highlighted, with a primary focus on the Indian Army from 1939 to 1942. The rapid expansion of the Indian Army and its concomitant lack of training in this period is described, as is its responsibility in the early defeats in the Far East: the Fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 marking the beginning of the end of the Empire in South East Asia.<sup>10</sup> It is well to note at this juncture that this volume is almost wholly concerned with the regular Indian Army, in which during wartime there were generally three brigades per division, typically with one British Army battalion in each brigade, alongside British field regiments from the Royal Artillery and other ancillary units.

Patrick Rose next examines the distinct Indian Army command culture of the period preceding the war. This was reflective of, and consistently maintained

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<sup>8</sup> See Compton Mackenzie, *Eastern Epic* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), Major General J.G. Elliott, *A Roll of Honour: The Story of the Indian Army, 1939–1945* (London: Cassell, 1965) and Bisheshwar Prasad, *Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War 1939–1945* (India and Pakistan: Combined Inter-Services Historical Section, 1954–64).

<sup>9</sup> See Ashley Jackson, *The British Empire and the Second World War* (London: Continuum, 2006). See also Ashley Jackson, *Distant Drums: The Role of Colonies in British Imperial Warfare* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> See Alan Warren, 'The Indian Army and the Fall of Singapore' in Brian Farrell and Sandy Hunter (eds), *Sixty Years On: The Fall of Singapore Revisited* (Singapore: Eastern Universities Press, 2003), pp. 270–89. See also Brian P. Farrell, *The Defence and Fall of Singapore 1940–1942* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus, 2005).



in, the North West Frontier campaigns and routine policing operations of the 1920s and 1930s. From the basis of a shared doctrine with the British Army of the same period, he demonstrates how the unique organisational and operational characteristics of the Indian Army's inter-war experience developed a manifestly different approach to command. Founded in the principles of what would now be termed mission command, this approach had its roots in the pragmatism and flexibility ingrained in the conduct of British imperial campaigns, but only became effectively institutionalised within the Indian Army because of its constant exposure to operations on the North West Frontier during this time. This persistent and routine experience formed a coherent command culture in the Indian Army officer corps quite unlike its British counterpart by the eve of the Second World War. Early fighting against the Japanese in Malaya and Burma during 1942–43 exposed some of the weaknesses of this approach and challenges inherent in effecting its use in large scale warfighting operations, but this culture of command formed a solid foundation to enable the successes the Indian Army achieved from the winter of 1943 until its final battlefield victory in August 1945.

Raymond Callahan's chapter charts Churchill's ambivalent attitude towards the Indian Army, and India itself, initially formed whilst serving with the 4th Hussars in the country during the nineteenth century. This low opinion was reinforced by the disastrous wartime defeats the Indian Army suffered in Malaya and Burma during 1941 and 1942. By the latter stages of the Second World War, Churchill was both un-interested in the feats of the Indian Army as well as its reconquest of Burma. Callahan also makes the important point that in addition to the severe challenges of expansion facing the wartime Indian Army, it was extremely short of equipment during the early stages of the war.

The doctrine and training of armies has only fairly recently become the subject of serious studies of the British and Indian Armies during the Second World War.<sup>11</sup> Alan Jeffreys demonstrates that the Indian Army proved particularly good at learning from experience across all operational theatres, transmitting battlefield lessons into training instructions and publications much more successfully than its British Army counterpart. The Indian Army of 1939 was a well trained, professional, Imperial policing force, but was not capable of fighting a modern army. Jeffreys shows how the Army adapted the existing training organisation to develop a comprehensive training structure and doctrine to fight effectively in the Far East and Europe during the Second

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<sup>11</sup> See David French, *Raising Churchill's Army* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Timothy Harrison Place, *Military Training in the British Army, 1940–1944* (London: Frank Cass, 2000). See also Marston, *Phoenix from the Ashes* and Moreman, *The Jungle, the Japanese and the Commonwealth Armies at War*.

World War. He examines and contextualises the important role played by a small number of pre-war Indian Army officers who took training very seriously before 1939, such as Major General Francis Taker and Major General Thomas Corbett, who inculcated a similar ethos in the next generation of senior Indian Army officers during the war.

Three Indian Army Divisions fought in the North African campaign but 4th Indian Division was the only formation to fight throughout the campaign from the Western Desert Force to its role as a founding element of the British Eighth Army in September 1941. Chris Mann's contribution considers the relationship of 4th Indian Division with its parent formation, British Eighth Army, during the fighting of 1943. It notes the self acknowledged (and encouraged) view held by those of 4th Indian Division, and its commander, Major General Francis Taker, that the formation was 'a division outside'; a tactical innovator much at odds with the rigid, upward-looking culture the author identifies within Eighth Army at this time. This chapter examines the effect of this uneasy position upon the role of 4th Indian Division in the Battle of Wadi Akarit, and how it influenced the relationship of its charismatic commander with his peers and superiors.

The Burma campaign was primarily fought by the Indian Army. Graham Dunlop and Tim Moreman both look at aspects of this campaign in the next chapters of the volume. Tim Moreman traces how the military effectiveness of the Indian Army in South East Asia was so dramatically transformed, with particular attention to the problem of Japanese defensive bunkers first encountered in the First Arakan campaign of 1942–43. Moreman's chapter examines a fascinating case study of wartime learning, and demonstrates how this problem was studied in India to develop the successful bunker-busting tactics used in the Second Arakan campaign of 1944. Graham Dunlop charts the Burma campaign from the key battles of Mandalay and Meiktila until the re-capture of Rangoon in 1945. His analysis then examines the claim as to whether this achievement was the last and greatest victory of the Indian Army.

The Indian Army controversially acted as a post-war occupation force in both French Indo-China and the Dutch East Indies at the end of the Second World War. Although much has been published about this period very little has concentrated on the Indian Army's role in post-war South East Asia. Daniel Marston re-evaluates the military effectiveness of the 20th Indian Division, under the command of General Douglas Gracey, in Saigon in 1945–46 and the ensuing political problems of their deployment.

Addressing the neglected subject of the Indian Army's experience during the period of Partition, the innovative studies of Ashok Nath and David Omissi look at the impact of this major event on the Indian Armoured Corps and the Gurkha regiments respectively. Ashok Nath examines the difficult

task of dividing the Indian Armed Forces in 1947, unprecedented in military history. The need to split units along ethnic and religious lines whilst keeping regimental identity intact presented tremendous difficulties. As Nath observes, that it was accomplished at all is a testament to the efforts of senior British and Indian Army officers. They were aided in their achievement by the existing class structure of units and sub-units within the combatant arms, combined with the mutual respect and goodwill prevalent amongst the diverse men of the Indian Army rank and file that was maintained even as their country was torn in two. The Gurkha Regiments occupied a unique place within the British Indian Army, and their peculiar status resulted in some of them becoming part of the British Army upon partition of the Indian Armed forces in 1947; the only element of the old Indian Army to do so. Omissi traces the roots of this decision back into the inter-war period, when Gurkha Regiments formed a distinct part of the Indian Army and were specifically excluded from the process of Indianisation. It concludes with an examination of the post Second World War debates about the separation of Gurkha units between Britain, India and Nepal, and how this was ultimately decided according to where the regiments were based and where in Nepal they were recruited, rather than considerations of seniority and royal patronage.

Robert Johnson's concluding chapter examines the Indian Army's role in providing 'aid to the civil power' on the North West Frontier from the 1930's to the end of imperial rule. The inter-war period was one of profound change, where rules of engagement were altered and civil primacy asserted more firmly despite the fact that frontier Pashtuns were better armed and there was greater civil unrest growing within India. The outbreak of the Second World War accelerated these changes and added further pressure on the Indian Army, which adapted quickly to manage a range of violent internal threats not only before the war, but during a period of mass unrest that had the potential to unhinge the entire defence of India in wartime.<sup>12</sup>

The editors would collectively like to thank all the historians, including Jahan Mahmood, who presented their research at the conference and have contributed to this volume. We acknowledge the support for the conference by John Delaney, Acting Head of the Department of Exhibits and Firearms, Imperial War Museum and Dr Helen McCartney, Senior Lecturer, Department of Defence Studies, King's College London. We would also like to thank Dr Bryn Hammond, co-convenor of the IWM History Group, and afford our sincere

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<sup>12</sup> An earlier version of this chapter by Johnson has appeared as 'The Army in India and Responses to Low-Intensity Conflict, 1936–1946', *Journal of Army Historical Research*, Vol. 89, No. 358, Summer 2011, pp. 159–81.

appreciation to Field Marshal Sir John Chapple who opened the conference and generously contributed the foreword.

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## Chapter 1

# The Evolution and Use of British Imperial Military Formations

Ashley Jackson

Then the marching began, the solemn convolutions of armed men, a khaki-coloured ballet of stiff arms and stiff legs. It was a scene beloved of the British, stamped out over half the world for two centuries and more. Men and arms, moving to orders, under a blue foreign sky.

– Square-bashing in Hong Kong, from Leslie Thomas,  
*Onward Virgin Soldiers* (1971).

This chapter considers Britain's use of indigenous armed forces during the days of empire. The Empire expanded and was defended by non-European soldiers and non-combatant military labourers. Mohawks during the Seven Years War, Africans during the Boer War, and Chinese and Egyptian labour corps during the First World War – non-European labour, forced and voluntary, was a leitmotif of imperial defence. So, too, was the ability through transport, communication, administrative, and personnel networks to recruit, move, utilise, and demobilise this enormous resource. Chinese gangers in Shanghai or tea planters in Assam were integral to the recruitment and mobilisation of labourers, as was the availability of the means by which to move them, to France, Java, Mesopotamia, or the Western Desert.

Thus the chapter reviews the role of imperial military formations and the British Empire's notable capacity to mobilise military and semi-military labour across national and colonial boundaries. It does this by considering a number of related themes: the role of imperial military formations, such as the Indian Army's activities on India's military peripheries; the expansion of the Indian Army and colonial formations during the Second World War; India's role in exporting models of military thinking and organisation throughout the Empire; and the post-imperial continuation of Britain's employment of overseas military formations and colonial infrastructure.

The Indian Army was by far the largest of a diverse range of imperial military formations that helped the British Army, the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, as well as colonial police forces, to protect the Empire from external and internal threats. This task was always beyond the power of the British armed forces alone. What is more, the Indian Army and the other permanent military establishments maintained in the colonies and the ‘white’ Dominions were aided by a host of voluntary and *ad hoc* formations, particularly during times of general war. The Indian Army was a core element of the complex, but interlinking, structures maintained to provide for the Empire’s local, regional, and international security through the use of indigenous military formations. But there were many other military units drawn from the scores of territories that made up the British Empire. As James Lunt reminds us:

From Wei-hai-Wei in North China to Port of Spain in Trinidad, and from Nova Scotia to Hobart in Tasmania there were soldiers organized, equipped, and drilled in accordance with the manuals issued by the War Office in London. Some were called Scouts, others were named Levies, or Rifle Corps, or Guides, or Rangers, or Camel Corps, or Militias, or Military Police, or Defence or Frontier Forces.<sup>1</sup>

Britain’s utilisation of colonial and semi-colonial military resources, including physical infrastructure, is usually an overlooked or taken-for-granted aspect in studies of British military affairs. But Britain’s military history is inseparably linked to the service of non-British and non-European military formations, some recruited on a permanent basis, others in an *ad hoc* manner, and the labour of hundreds of thousands of indigenous men and women. These included 30,000 people employed in Malta’s dockyards, scores of thousands of Indians required to build military infrastructure in order to meet the challenge of Japan, and over 100,000 Chinese labourers employed on the Western Front.

Institutions of the British state and private institutions benefiting from state backing, such as the chartered companies and their paramilitary forces, proved highly successful, over the course of three centuries, in recruiting and utilising indigenous military formations.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding mutinies – some famous,

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<sup>1</sup> James Lunt, *Imperial Sunset: Frontier Soldiering in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macdonald, 1981), p. xiii. Lunt was dissuaded from applying to the Indian Army because of his father’s belief, in 1936, that India would be independent within a decade (his father was on the staff of the Military Academy at Dehra Dun). Lunt spent a third of his 35-year military career with the Burma Rifles, the Arab Legion, and the Aden Protectorate Levies.

<sup>2</sup> For a compendious bibliographical study of these formations see Roger Perkins, *Regiments: Regiments and Corps of the British Empire and British Commonwealth, 1758–1993* (Newton Abbot: The Author, 1994).

most forgotten – this is a resounding fact.<sup>3</sup> What is more, the longevity of the British Empire, and the projection of power from its regional power centres around the world, would have been impossible without this skill. There were never enough settlers to man the barricades and dispossess the natives, never enough redcoats to defeat internal resistance and rebellions and win later-day counterinsurgency campaigns, even had it been politic to use them. Indigenous allies, formal and informal, were always crucial. Whilst the British were naturally keen (often after a spot of violent ‘pacification’) to cultivate the image of harmonious civil rule, colonial control was ultimately based upon the threat of violence. Civil administration based on political alliance with indigenous leaders was real enough, and very much a feature of the edifice of imperial governance and authority; but so too was the presence and effectiveness of military power. Britain’s ultimate ability to enforce its suzerainty at the point of a bayonet or through the demonstration effect of a cruiser’s main armament was crucial to the functioning of a global empire.

There was always effective Military Aid to the Civil Authority available within the British imperial structure, and even in the worst case scenario, as demonstrated by the Indian Mutiny-Rebellion, though the mills of British retribution might grind slow, they ground exceeding small. Unlike pre-modern empires, the British Empire could exact its power even in the remotest corners of the earth, because of the strategic lift of its marine and the technological and organisational sophistication of its forces – metropolitan and indigenous – on land. From the early twentieth century, its capacity to police the Empire was augmented by the dawn of air power. So, although what has been referred to as the Empire’s steel frame – the men of the imperial civil services – were vital, so too was the cold steel frame of the Indian Army and the gallimaufry of smaller colonial organisations, from the Trucial Oman Scouts and the Fiji Defence Force to the Sarawak Rangers and the Hadhrami Bedouin Legion.

The role of colonies in defending Britain and the Empire was better acknowledged at the time than it has been in subsequent historical memory. At Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee in 1897, for example, colonial military formations featured prominently in the procession through London that accompanied the Queen’s carriage. There were, of course, plenty of representatives from the Dominions and India. From the subcontinent came a deputation of officers from the Imperial Service Troops, a force of 20,000 men raised by India’s princes to commemorate the 1887 jubilee. There were cavalry contingents from Canada and Natal, and mounted infantry units from Cape

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<sup>3</sup> See Lawrence James, *Mutiny in the British and Commonwealth Forces, 1797–1956* (London: Buchan and Enright, 1987).



Town, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, and Victoria. The procession included representatives of the 48th Canadian Highlanders and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, as well as the Perth (West Australia) Artillery Volunteers. But interspersed among these Dominions and Indian units, in all their elaborate regimental splendour, were the men of the colonial empire. Colonial units involved in the procession at the heart of this imperial jamboree were the Trinidad Mounted Rifles and the Cypriot Zaptiehs, a military police unit of 670 men. The 1,100-strong Malta Militia was represented as was the Royal Malta Artillery, a 460-strong regular corps of the British Army recruited in Malta. There was also the Trinidad Field Artillery, the West African Infantry, the Trinidad Infantry, Dyak Police of the British North Borneo Company, the Jamaica Artillery, the Sierra Leone Artillery, the Sierra Leone Force, Hausa soldiers, the British Guiana Police, the Ceylon Light Infantry, the Ceylon Artillery Volunteers, and soldiers from Hong Kong and the Straits Settlement.<sup>4</sup>

Indigenous military formations recruited, trained, and led by British officers and NCOs were essential in creating the colonial state throughout the world and then protecting it, gathering to the British a monopoly of lethal force by emasculating indigenous polities. This monopoly was the bedrock of the subsequent *civilianisation* of British rule. In protecting the colonial state thus founded, the British Empire never lost its dependence upon indigenous allies, in the form of military and paramilitary soldiers, political and economic allies, clerks, interpreters, and labourers. Even during the initial phase of conflict that often occurred when a new tract of foreign territory was absorbed into the Empire, the British frequently relied on local people to overcome their adversaries. In Asia, decisive forward moves such as the Battle of Plassey and the conquest of the kingdom of Kandy were achieved not just by the use of European and indigenous military formations, but by the employment of cunning and subterfuge involving British and indigenous spies and go-betweens, pretenders to thrones, and bribery. The British employed any technique that could be used to undermine, overcome, conquer, and absorb powerful kingdoms.

In its world wars and its local wars Britain required professional military structures, such as the Indian Army and the King's African Rifles, which could be expanded exponentially. These permanent formations were at the heart of the Empire's impressive force generation capability. In 1914 the strength of the Indian Army stood at 155,423, a figure that had risen to 573,484 by the time of the Armistice, 'including large armies serving in Palestine, Egypt, Iraq,

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<sup>4</sup> John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera, Bodleian Library, Oxford. *Illustrated Programme of the Royal Jubilee Procession* (London: Prince of Wales Hospital Fund for London, 1897).

Salonika, and elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Other military formations followed suit. The King's African Rifles began the First World War with 2,300 officers and men in three battalions, and ended it with 33,300 men in 22 battalions (the same occurred again in the Second World War, the force rising from a peacetime strength of six battalions to 43 battalions by 1945). These were the major fighting forces of the Empire, permanently maintained forces readily expanded during times of war.

Alongside them, however, there were a range of other military formations, often part-time volunteer units or units created specifically for the demands of a certain war, and often designated *local*, as opposed to imperial, troops, denoting their role in home defence as opposed to overseas operations. Such units included the 2,000-strong Mauritius Defence Force – a home guard formation that like its British counterpart attracted some derision, but their members would have died as well as any other men if the Japanese had invaded – and the 250,000-strong Kikuyu Home Guard formed to help the British during the Mau Mau emergency in Kenya. Another distinct category of indigenous military strength was *ad hoc* units set up specifically to answer particular wartime needs. Thus in 1941, facing a manpower crisis in the Middle East following the loss of large numbers of Pioneer soldiers in Crete and Greece, the Commander-in-Chief Middle East asked the Southern African High Commission Territories to supply soldiers. From scratch, beginning with chiefly recruitment meetings and the arrival of British base depot teams, a force of over 36,000 men was soon recruited, trained, delivered, and in service across North Africa and Southern Europe. There were then a whole range of specialist units dependent upon colonial labour: South African mineworkers served in engineer units that blasted a railway through rock to link Beirut and Haifa; Basotho muleteers were employed in the Italian mountains; Iban Dyak trackers from Borneo served with SOE during the war and with infantry regiments such as the Green Howards during the Malayan Emergency; the Royal Garrison Artillery was manned by men from Ceylon, Hong Kong and Singapore.<sup>6</sup> Finally, in addition to all of these permanent fighting units and hostilities-only fighting and 'rear echelon' units, there were then a host of indigenous people recruited as general workers supporting British military bases and infrastructure, such as the 'hangar boys' recruited to support the work of the Empire Air Training Scheme in Southern Rhodesia, Asian

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<sup>5</sup> *The Army in India and its Evolution, Including an Account of the Establishment of the Royal Air Force in India* (Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Printing India, 1924), p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> For the development of British special forces and the Empire, see Ashley Jackson, 'The Imperial Antecedents of British Special Forces', *RUSI Journal*, 154, 3 (2009) and Andrew Hargreaves, 'The Advent, Evolution, and Value of British Specialist Formations in the Desert War, 1940–43', *Global War Studies*, 7, 2 (2010).