

THE LUSHAIS
1878—1889

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Contents

	Page
Part I. Frontier Defence	
Chapter I Our Outposts	1
Chapter II Hill Tippera Posts	6
Chapter III Extra Precautions	10
Part II. The Lushai Chiefs	
Chapter IV Relations of the Lushais with each other	18
Chapter V Relations of the Lushais with the Howlongs & Sylus	30
Chapter VI Relations of the Lushais with the Suktes	37
Part III. Our Relations with the Lushais	
Chapter VII The Bazars	41
Chapter VIII Our Policy regarding Settlers & Refugees	76
Chapter IX Misc. Matters & Points of Policy	90
Chapter X Relations with Individual Chiefs	108
Part IV.	
Chapter XI Relations of Manipur with the Lushais	139
Part V.	
The Lushai Routes	154

THE LUSHAIS.

PART I.—FRONTIER DEFENCE

CHAPTER 1—OUR OUTPOSTS

1. Before the expedition of 1871-72, the Lushais, the Howlongs, and the Sylus used to raid on Cachar and Sylhet through Cachar on Hill Tippera and through Hill Tippera into Sylhet. After the close of the expedition, when the line of policy to be adopted was laid down by the Government of India, it was decided that our Sylhet and Cachar frontier should be protected by a line of posts, and that the responsibility for the defence of Tippera should rest with the Raja, who should also be called upon to co-operate effectually in the establishment of a defensive line in order to bar the door of access through his territory to our districts.

Policy laid down after expedition of 1871-72.—Frontier to be defended by line of posts.

2. When it came to fixing the position of our outposts in Cachar and Sylhet, there was a considerable difference of opinion as to the line to be adopted. Two lines were suggested, which were known as the Outer and Inner Line.

Sir Frederick Roberts, who had been Deputy-Quartermaster General in the Cachar column of the expeditionary force, recommended an advanced line of posts, which, beginning at Mynadhar on the east of Cachar, should extend, through the Bhubans, Monierkhal, Bongkong, Kolosib, Bhoirabi tila, and Jhalnachera, to the Chattachura Peak (old position down south),

Difference of opinion regarding the line of outposts to be adopted.

from whence it would turn southwards to the Sorphnel Peak in Lushai-land, and from there run past Sirthay Tlang and the Chittagong Frontier to Tulukme in Aracan.

The local authorities, i. e., the Commissioner of Dacca and the Brigadier-general Commanding the North-eastern Frontier, on the other hand, recommended an Inner Line, which should follow very much the positions of our present posts.

Arguments in
favour of the
Outer Line.

3. Sir Frederick Roberts explained his views as follows :—

“Taking the Cachar frontier first, and travelling from east to west, we find that protection is required from the Barak river to the Chattachura Peak, between which the following ranges of hills run parallel to each other, and nearly at right angles to the line of defence, viz., the Bhubans between the Barak and the Sonai ; the Lungmai between the Sonai and the Rukni ; the Rengti between the Rukni and the Dhaleswar ; and the Hachik between the Dhaleswar and Hill Tippera. It is along the crests of these hills that the Lushais have invariably approached when raiding on the teagardens of Sylhet and Cachar, and it is on these hills therefore that our posts should be established. With the solitary exception of the one near Chattachura, all our posts have hitherto been situated in valleys between these ranges, and have evidently been selected more with a view of giving confidence to the planters and their coolies than for the purpose of repelling raids. No communications exist from one to the other, and they are all so overlooked that the Lushais have had no difficulty in determining when and where attacks could best be

made. From these ridges an extensive view can be obtained of the surrounding country."

Arguments in
favour of the
Inner Line.

4. The arguments adduced by the local officers in favour of the Inner Line are shown in the following extract :-

"The first objection to the system of having all the posts on the tops of the ridges of the hills is the great scarcity of water, which is known to be a peculiar feature of these hills. The next is the very large number of men who will be required to hold so many posts and the expense of provisioning them and keeping open the roads connecting them with each other and with the station of Cachar. But the most serious objection to the scheme of posts as laid down by Colonel Roberts is that it encloses an enormous tract of virgin forest and swamp within the line of defence separating the posts from the nearest tea-gardens or villages. No one, it is believed, is so sanguine as to hope that raids can be prevented by a line of posts located in a jungle, where the eye cannot penetrate twenty yards in any direction; and the results of placing our outposts on the hill tops on the lines recommended by Colonel Roberts would be that the Lushais would slip past our guards without the smallest difficulty, their scouts watching carefully when the road was clear of the patrol; and the first intimation the outposts, say of Kolosib or Bongkong, would receive of an attack on Jafirbund or Loarbund would probably reach them two or three days after the occurrence was known in Cachar."

5. At the time Sir Frederick Roberts made his proposals, the eastern portion of Hill Tippera had not

Reasons for abandoning the line by the Hachik range. been surveyed ; and when this was done, in the following cold season of 1872-73, it was found that the hilly tract south of Sylhet was almost entirely uninhabited to a considerable distance west of the Hachik range, and that there were no unknown tribes living there who could have committed the raids on Sylhet in former years. It was also shown conclusively that a line of outposts on the Hachik range could only be kept up at an enormous cost, which the Hill Tippera State could not support, and that such a line would be almost certainly useless if established.

6. On the Chief Commissioner of Assam expressing a decided opinion in 1874 in favour of the Inner Line of outposts in Cachar as opposed to the Outer Line, the Government of India signified its approval to the proposals he advocated. The question of the Sylhet line of posts was not settled till 1876, in which year it was decided to adhere to the line previously existing with some slight modifications, due mainly to the advance of cultivation.

Both the Sylhet and Cachar outposts have been retained up to the present day in much the same positions as they occupied in 1874.

7. The present positions of our southern outposts in Sylhet and Cachar and their strength in the cold weather, are shown in the following table :—

	Subadars.	Jemadars.	Havildars.	Sepoys.	Total.
Jhirighat	2	12	14
Mynadhar	2	20	22

References—Paragraphs 1 to 6.—Files 37 of 1874, 326 of 1875, 158 of 1876 and 108 of 1877. Mackenzie pages 489, 482, 490.

	Subadars	Jamadars	Havildars	Sepoys	Total
Monierkal.....	.....	.....	2	20	22
Noarbund.....	.....	1	2	20	23
Jhalnacherra...	.....	1	3	29	33
Chattachura...	1	.....	2	20	23
Oliviacherra....	.....	.....	2	20	22
Lakhimamla....	.....	.....	2	20	22
Fatehkuli.....	.....	1	2	19	22
Adampur.....	.....	.....	2	20	22
Total.....	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>200</u>	<u>225</u>

with a reserve in Silchar averaging about 230 of all ranks. The following table shows the strength of the reserve on the 1st January of the last four years :—

	Suba- dars.	Jama- dars.	Havil- dars.	Sepoys.	Buglers.	Total.
1st January 1886...	1	5	24	201	6	237
Ditto 1887...	2	6	17	162	5	192
Ditto 1888...	1	5	17	212	4	239
Ditto 1889...	1	4	19	229	4	257

In the rains, the outposts of Jhirighat, Mynadhar, Monierkhal, Jhalnacherra and Oliviacherra are abolished, and the remainder reduced to the following strength :—

	Havildars.	Sepoys.	Total.
Noarbund.....	2	10	12
Chattachura.....	2	16	18
Lakhimamla.....	1	10	11
Fatehkuli.....	1	10	11
Adampur.....	1	10	11
	—	—	—
Total.....	7	56	63

There is no instance on record of Lushais coming

into the plains in numbers between May and October with hostile intentions. But between those months they occasionally come into Silchar with messages from their chiefs, and also sometimes occupy huts in the low hills south of the district for purposes of collecting rubber or hunting, in numbers of from 5 to 25 men.

Patrol communication is kept up regularly between adjoining posts.

CHAPTER II.—THE HILL TIPPERA POSTS.

8. In 1874, when the Maharaja of Hill Tippera was called on to adopt measures with a view to strengthening our line of posts and protecting his own territory, he, acting on the advice of the Political agents, offered to establish three outposts along his northern boundary, where it marched with Sylhet. The chief Commissioner of Assam was consulted, but was not in a position to offer an opinion till 1876, when he recommended the establishment of the posts at the places suggested by the Hill Tippera authorities. The following extract, in which the Chief Commissioner signified his concurrence, is taken from the report submitted by the officer specially deputed to enquire into the question of the Sylhet outposts :—

“I have read the correspondence about the Tippera outposts very carefully, and have made enquiries at every post near the Tippera frontier ; and I have come to the conclusion that it is not advisable to trust to the Raja's posts in the very slightest degree, and our plan of defence should be complete without them. If they

should ever be established at the points Mr. Power (the political Agent of Hill Tippera) has chosen, they might be of use in giving intelligence to the Sylhet outposts, in which each is linked ; and I would have regular patrols between our guards and the Raja's ; but I would only depend on his men for information they might be able to give, and not for defensive purposes. Intelligence is much wanted on the Sylhet part of the frontier ; for, as far as I could make out, there is no sort of intercourse between the Lushais and people on the Sylhet frontier."

The Government of India in June 1877 approved of the posts being established at the places named, where they have remained up to the present time, viz., Dharmanagar, Koilashur (or Chirakuti), and Kamalpur ; and in consequence of a very unfavourable report which had recently been furnished by the Political Agent, at the same time expressed an opinion that, in selecting the sepoy's for garrisoning these posts, the Raja should be advised by the Political Agent, who should also insist upon the men being properly disciplined, equipped, and punctually paid. Notwithstanding these precautions, it appears from a report submitted by Mr. Daly, Commandant of the Frontier Police, in 1886, that the post had lapsed into a very unsatisfactory condition.

9. In August 1887, the government of Bengal asked the Chief Commissioner's opinion on a proposal of the Commissioner of Chittagong to abolish the Hill Tippera outposts at the three places above named. The Commissioner alleged that they looked

Proposal by
Commissioner
of Chittagong
in 1887 to abo-
lish the Hill Ti-
ppera outposts.

more like a line of outposts to watch our line on their west than a line to defend their territory and Sylhet from the Lushais ; and he also said that the Maharaja kept up "advanced posts of hillmen further inland and that he thought it would suffice if "in the event of any raid taking place, these hill levies should give prompt intelligence to the nearest British frontier post."

10. The Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet and Commandant of the Frontier Police, who were consulted by the Chief Commissioner, both thought that the outposts might be abolished ; but the Deputy-Commissioner qualified his opinion with the suggestion that the Maharaja's responsibility for raids through his territory should be maintained, and that the advanced posts of hillmen should be kept up, and be required to report suspicious movements among the Lushais to the nearest British post.

The Chief Commissioner's objections to their abolition.

The Chief Commissioner replied to the Government of Bengal, in February 1888, as follows :—

"In reply, I am to say that Mr. Fitzpatrick finds it was admitted on all hands, after the close of the Lushai campaign, that the Tippera State was bound to take its share in the protection of this frontier, that the posts it question were established by it at the instance of the British authorities after the fullest discussion of the question, and that the Chief commissioner does not think they should be altogether abolished."

"The Chief Commissioner, however, thinks they might be reduced in strength, say, to a guard of 12 or 15 men each. It was scarcely hoped at the time they were established that they should be of much service

for the purpose of actual resistance ; for that it was apprehended we should have to look to our own posts within the frontier, and this has proved to be the case. On the footing on which they are at present maintained by the Tippera State, they should be, as appears from a report recently received from Mr. Daly, Commandant of the Surma Valley Frontier Police Battalion of little or no use for the purpose of defence ; and it is to be feared that they are less likely now than before to be put on such a footing as would make them really efficient for this purpose.

“But it was considered at the time they were established that they would be useful as advanced posts of observation, which would communicate with our outposts, and the Chief commissioner thinks they could be made very useful in this way under a regular system of patrolling between them and our outposts ; while, if they were altogether abolished, not only should we be deprived of a source of information, but further it is to be feared that the Tippera State would completely lose whatever little sense it has hitherto displayed of its responsibility in connection with the protection of this frontier. Mr Fitzpatrick feels sure that in the absence of some establishment of this sort we should never get a word of information from that quarter as to the movements of the Lushais.

“In conclusion, I am to express a hope that, if the strength of the posts is reduced to the extent above suggested, the guards maintained there may be put on such an improved footing that they could at least usefully co-operate with the men of our outposts in the

event of a raid. They should receive distinct orders to communicate with the patrols of the nearest Sylhet posts, which daily pass them from within the frontier, and impart to them any information they may have regarding the movements of the Lushais. If his Honour the Lieutenant-Governor will cause orders in this sense to be issued, the Chief Commissioner will see that the needful orders are given to the Frontier Police in Sylhet."

When the outposts were first started, the nominal strength was fixed at 30, 35, and 40 men respectively.

11. The Bengal government, on being put in possession of the Chief Commissioner's views, submitted proposals for patrol communication, and orders were issued in accordance with these proposals to our own frontier posts in Sylhet in January last. Certain spots and days of the week are fixed for meeting and interchanging news.

Establishment of patrol communication between our posts and those of Hill Tippera.

CHAPTER III.—EXTRA PRECAUTIONS.

12. In the cold weather of 1883-84 there was a general feeling on the southern frontier, especially on the Cachar side, that the Lushais intended to raid on our territory. A description of what occurred at the time will be found in paragraph 101 of this Note. Some of the rumours spread were exaggerated or untrue, as was afterwards discovered ; but at the time there was a very real panic among the Kuki punjis and tea-gardens along the Cachar frontier, and it was considered by the authorities advisable to take precautions. In Cachar, a

Precautions taken during the Lushai scare of 1883-84