

The Indian Army 1910-1940 - The Infantry, Part 1

Introduction

The acquisition of a few new postcards and figures gave me occasion for certain inquiries into the infantry of the Indian Army and its composition. The subject itself is quite extensive - in 1914 the army consisted of 107 independent infantry battalions as well as 11 regiments of two battalions each, to which must be added a larger number of battalions that local regents made available to the government. The changing names of battalions and regiments do not make it easier to get an overview of the subject, but fortunately over time the subject has been dealt with by many authors, just as the often picturesque uniforms have attracted the attention of many artists.

One of the main works for the early part of the period is the book *Armies of India* by Major AC Lovett (illustrations) and Major GF MacMunn (text), Adam and Charles Black, London 1911. The book is probably best known for its 72 color plates, which fortunately also published as postcards - more recently by the National Army Museum in London, but also approx. 1920 by the same publisher that published the book.

The following is not a complete list of all units, but is the result of work to get a handle on the connection between certain illustrations and the actual organization. The topic is explained through a summary of the organization and selected examples of the period's uniforming, with the main emphasis on the field uniforms.

Already here it went wrong...



Corps present at the Siege and Assault of Delhi in 1857.

Drawn by AC Lowett, 1910.

Postcard from the National Army Museum, London.

More than 30 years ago I bought this map at Model & Hobby in Frederiksborggade. The map was instrumental in furthering my interest in the Indian Army and a fascination with the many intriguing but often quite confusing regimental names.

From left to right:

- 1st King George's Own Sappers & Miners,
- 21st Prince Albert Victor's Own Cavalry (Frontier Force) (Daly's Horse),
- 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force),
- 22nd Sam Browne's Cavalry (Frontier Force),
- 3rd Queen Alexandra's Own Gurkha Rifles,
- 55th Coke's Rifles (Frontier Force),
- King Edward's Own Gurkha Rifles (The Simoor Rifles),
- 29th Hudson's Horse,
- 10th Duke of Cornwall's Own Lancers (Hodson's Horse),
- 32nd Sikh Pioneers,
- Queen's Own Corps of Guides (Lumsden's),
- 56th Punjabi Rifles (Frontier Force),

54th Sikhs (Frontier Force) og
Queen Mary's Own 127th Baluch Light Infantry.

The planch is also a good example of Major Lowett's many talented watercolors, which also repeat some of the figures:

The statue in the background depicts Brigadier General John Nicholson, who led the forces that liberated besieged Delhi on 14 September 1857. General Nicholson was badly wounded during the attack and died shortly afterwards.

Reference

A list of the composition of the Indian Army in 1918, with links to an overview of the history of individual units, can be found on the Land Forces of Britain, the Empire and Commonwealth website. This overview can be an excellent starting point for further studies of the subject.

Organisation

1903 scheme

In 1914, an Indian infantry battalion usually included 14 British and 16 Indian officers, as well as 896 non-commissioned officers and privates. The battalions (in the field army) had 2 medium heavy machine guns (Maxim). The organization was the old English organization (which was abandoned in 1913) with 8 small companies, which, however, in battle functioned together two by two, under the designation *double company*. Some of the battalions deployed on the Western Front in 1914-15 used the new English organization with staff and staff element and 4 companies. The change was ordered while the Expeditionary Force was still at sea; certain battalions retained the old system, thereby avoiding some of the confusion brought about by adaptation to the new system. The 8 company system was finally abolished in the Indian Army in 1916.

1922 scheme



Light machine gun (Lewis Gun) deployed against air targets in Mesopotamia, approx. 1917.

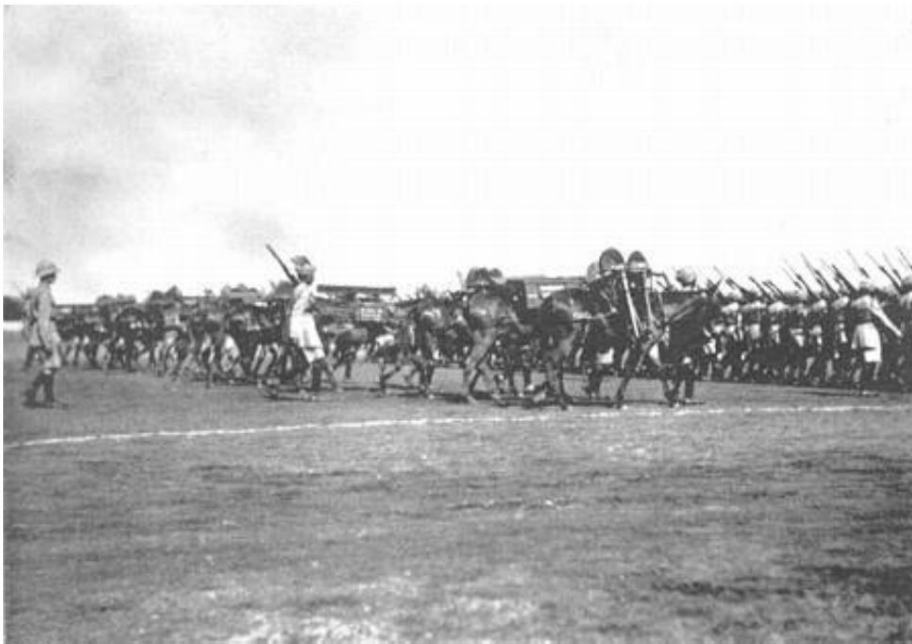


Mule-borne Vickers machine gun, approx. 1939.

Drawing by Christopher Rothero
from *Battle magazine*, October 1976.

Correspondingly, the motorization of the battalions' fencing equipment and other transport equipment also mostly only happened after the battalions had been sent off for their overseas assignments; before motorisation, a battalion commanded approximately 80 mules, carrying everything from machine guns, mortars, long tools and spare ammunition and supplies.

The mule driver is wearing a Model 1937 packing system.



Mule-borne fencing training in the 1930s.

From *Horses and Saddlery* by G. Tylden,
JA Allen & Company, London 1965, reprinted 1980.

The device is not further identified; it may be infantry, but given the long objects carried on some of the mules, the most likely is perhaps infantry pioneers (*Pioneers*) or engineer troops (*Sappers and Miners*).

Other things

British infantry battalions stationed in India before the Second World War had an Indian machine gun platoon attached. The division was "inherited" from one English battalion to the next.

The responsibility for the formation and training of these platoons lay in the hands of the *10th (Training) Battalion, 17th Dogra Regiment*.

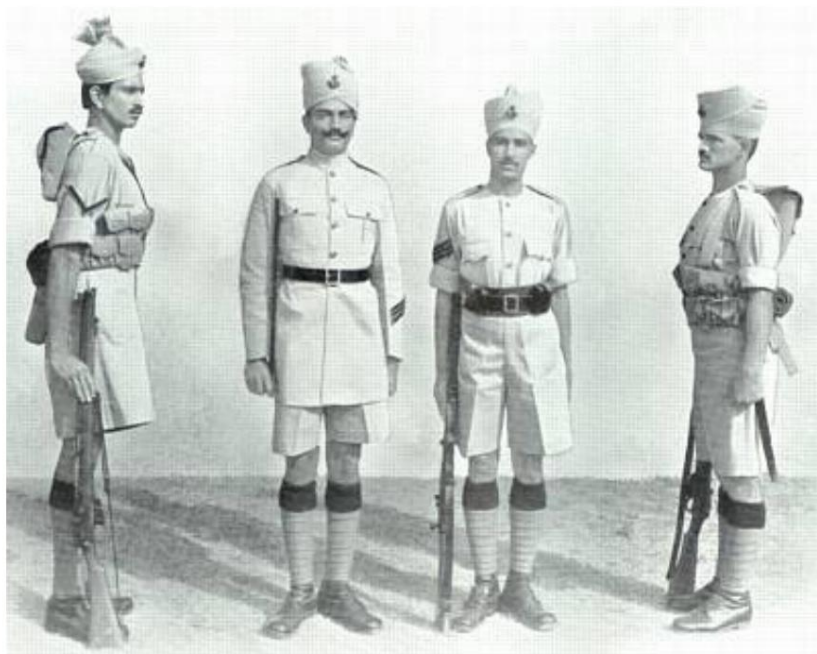
6th Rajputana Rifles



6th Rajputana Rifles. Regimental badge, 1940.
From Source 1.

According to the 1922 scheme, the regiment consisted of:

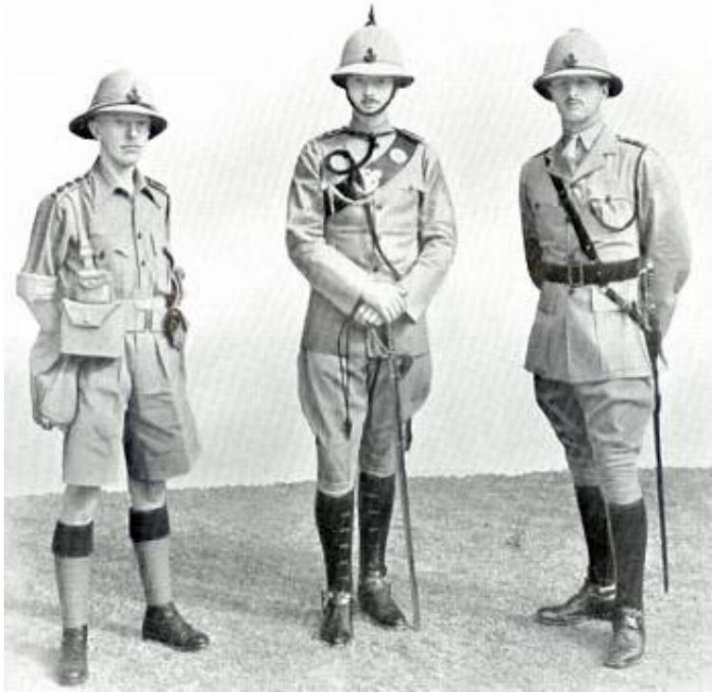
1st Bn. (formerly *104th Wellesley's Rifles*) 2nd Bn.
(formerly *120th Rajputana Infantry*) 3rd Bn. (formerly
122nd Rajputana Infantry) 4th Bn. (formerly *123rd*
Outram's Rifles) 5th Bn. (formerly *125th Napier's*
Rifles) 10th (Training) Bn. (formerly *13th Rajputs*
(*The Shekhawati Regiment*)).



Soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 6th Rajputana Rifles (Wellesley's), 1936.
From the King Emperor website, from which the
pictures of the battalion's English and Indian officers also come.

th Under the *Bombay Infantry* The history of the battalion goes back to 1775. In 1800 it served in
name *4 General Wellesley's* (later Duke of Wellington) forces. In a report he highlighted their effectiveness in battle
and a correspondingly modest training.

In the 1903 scheme, the battalion was given the designation *104th Wellesley's Rifles*, which in connection with the 1922 scheme became the *1st Battalion, 6th Rajputana Rifles (Wellesley's)*.



English officers of the 1st Battalion, 6th Rajputana Rifles (Wellesley's), 1936.



Indian officers of the 1st Battalion, 6th Rajputana Rifles (Wellesley's), 1936.



Guards from 1st Battalion, 6th Rajputana Rifles, Egypt, 1940.
From Source 3.

On 3 September 1939, the 1st Battalion was in Egypt, as part of the 11th Indian Infantry Brigade, 4th Indian Division, and it is therefore most likely that soldiers from this battalion are shown in the following photographs from 1940.

As part of the 4th Indian Division, the battalion took part in the fighting in Ethiopia in 1941.



Hornblower of 1st Battalion, 6th Rajputana Rifles, Egypt, 1940.
From Source 3.

The 4th Indian Division then fought as part of the 8th Arme, in North Africa and Italy, and the 1st Battalion excelled, among other things. at Monte Cassino.

The hunter designation (*rifles*) originates from 1841, when the 1st Battalion, as the first Indian, was transformed into a hunter battalion.

As the oldest, and thus most distinguished, fighter battalion, it occupied the place of honor on parades on the left wing - a tradition that goes back to the classic formation of an infantry battalion, with the grenadier company on the right wing and the light company on the left wing.

The tradition is still maintained in the Indian Army, where today's Rajputana Rifles occupy this place of honor.

Referrals

1. [Rajputana Rifles, general](#)
2. The Indian Army, 3 September 1939
3. Rajputana Rifles, India, incl. history
- 4th Rajputana Rifles, India, incl. history

Name changes

1903

104th Wellesley's Rifles

1922

1st Bn., 6th Rajputana Rifles (Wellesley's)

120th Rajputana Infantry	2nd Bn., 6th Rajputana Rifles (Prince of Wales' Own)
122nd Rajputana Infantry	3rd Bn., 6th Rajputana Rifles
123rd Outram's Rifles	4th Bn., 6th Rajputana Rifles (Outram's)
125th Napier's Rifles	5th Bn., 6th Rajputana Rifles (Napier's)
13th Rajputs (The Shekhawati Regiment) 10th (Training) Bn., 6th Rajputana Rifles (Shekhawati)	

12th Frontier Force Regiment



*12th Frontier Force Regiment.
Regimental badge, 1940.
From Source 1.*

According to the 1922 scheme, the regiment consisted of:

- 1st Bn. (formerly *51st Sikhs*)
- 2nd Bn. (formerly *52nd Sikhs*)
- 3rd Bn. (formerly *53rd Sikhs*)
- 4th Bn. (formerly *54th Sikhs*)
- 5th Bn. (formerly *1st Bn. Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides Infantry*) 10th (Training) Bn. (formerly *2nd Bn. Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides Infantry*).

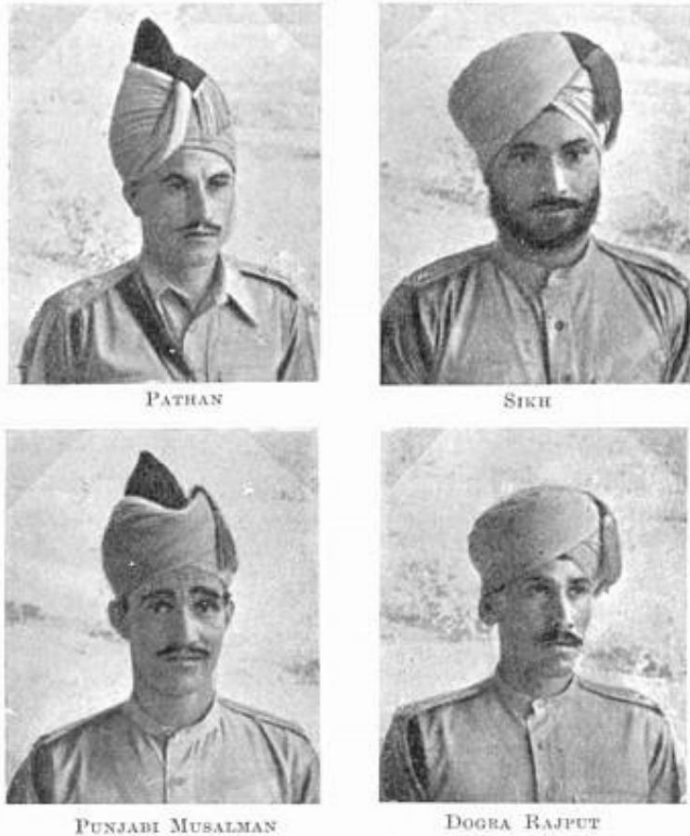
The Indian army included numerous races, castes, creeds and languages, with consequent traditions and cultures; here under a named group. Taking into account these differences, two different methods were used in the composition of the military units:

- a battalion - a group a
- company - a group.

In the latter case, up to eight groups could be represented in a battalion, but the most common was up to four.

The 12th Frontier Force Regiment was thus composed of Pathans, Sikhs, Punjabis and Dogras. The same regard for differences was not shown after the partition of India, where religion was precisely a decisive factor in the determination of future belonging. The regiment, which now belonged to the Pakistan Army, came exclusively to

consist of Pathans and Punjabis, while Sikhs and Dogras were exiled to India.



Types of men enlisted into the Frontier Force Regiments, 1938.

From Source 1.

The cultural differences were most clearly reflected in the way in which the individual groups tie their turbans, and is thus the reason why you can experience great differences in the appearance of the headgear in the same department.

Sikhs are further distinguished by their full beards, as their religion requires uncut hair and beard growth.

The units of the Frontier Force were traditionally nicknamed *piffers*, which dates from 1851, when the local troops on the North West Frontier were called the Punjab Irregular Force (PIF).

The designation, which in 1865 became Punjab Frontier Force, to be shortened to Frontier Force in 1903, lives on in today's Pakistan Army.

Two appendices to the official history of the Indian Expeditionary Force in France 1914-15 by Lieutenant Colonel Merewether and Sir Frederick Smith are available on the Internet: Description of the Indian Army and Health of the Indian Troops in France. Here is an introduction to, among other things, the composition of the units.



Punjab Frontier Force - Private, 59th Scinde Rifles, bagpipers, 51st Sikhs as well as officer (lieutenant/subadar?) and private, 56th Punjabi Rifles.
 Drawn by AC Lowett, 1910. Postcard from the National Army Museum, London.



Queen's Own Corps of Guides (Lumsden's) - Private of the infantry and sergeant (daffadar) of the cavalry.
 Drawn by AC Lowett, 1910. Postcard from the National Army Museum, London.

Name changes

1903	1922
59th Scinde Rifles	6th Bn., 13th Frontier Force Rifles (Split)
51st Sikhs	1st Bn., 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Prince of Wales' Own) (Sikhs)
56th Punjabi Rifles	2nd Bn., 13th Frontier Force Rifles
Queen's Own Corps of Guides (INF)	5th Bn., 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Queen Victoria's Own Corps of Guides)
Queen's Own Corps of Guides	

The pointed object seen on several of the turbans is called a *kullah*.



*A kullah, stamped 1942.
Found for sale on eBay.*

The kullah is a cone-shaped, fixed "skull" around which certain groups tie their turban; the fabric is called a lungi or pagri.

Other groups do not use the kullah, and to compensate for this, have a longer lungi/pagri.

It is said that there are more than 400 different ways to tie a turban, which easily explains their diverse appearances.



*Punjab Frontier Force: Corporal (naik),
57th (Wilde's) Rifles (Frontier Force) and*

lieutenant (subadar),

53rd Sikhs (Frontier Force).

Drawn by AC Lowett, 1910.

Postcard from the National Army Museum, London.

The 53rd Sikhs since 1855 wore black coat of arms, although the color is bluish on the rendering, and is seen here applied to the collar and insignia, as well as the kullah and lungi.

The lieutenant's wraps should also be black, which is said to be a distinctive feature of *the 53rd Sikhs*. If so, the color is not unique to the regiment, as black wraps are also seen on illustrations of other regiments' uniforms.

Referrals

1. 12th Frontier Force Regiment, general
2. 53rd Sikhs (Frontier Force), uniforms
3. 12th Frontier Force Regiment, Pakistan, incl. history
4. Pakistan: The Frontier Force Regiment
5. 12th Frontier Force Regiment, Pakistan (1965)

Badges: 53rd Sikhs (of The British Empire)



At the front of the cartridge belt, the officer wears this badge.



Regimental badge of the 53rd Sikhs, pre 1903.



The officer carries on his back a cartridge case on which this mark is placed.

Name changes

1903

1922

53rd Sikhs 3rd Bn., 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Sikhs)

57th Rifles 4th Bn., 13th Frontier Force Rifles (Wilde's)

In connection with the 25th anniversary of King George VI's reign in 1935, 3rd Bn., 12th Frontier Force Regiment (Sikhs) was assigned the designation *Royal*.