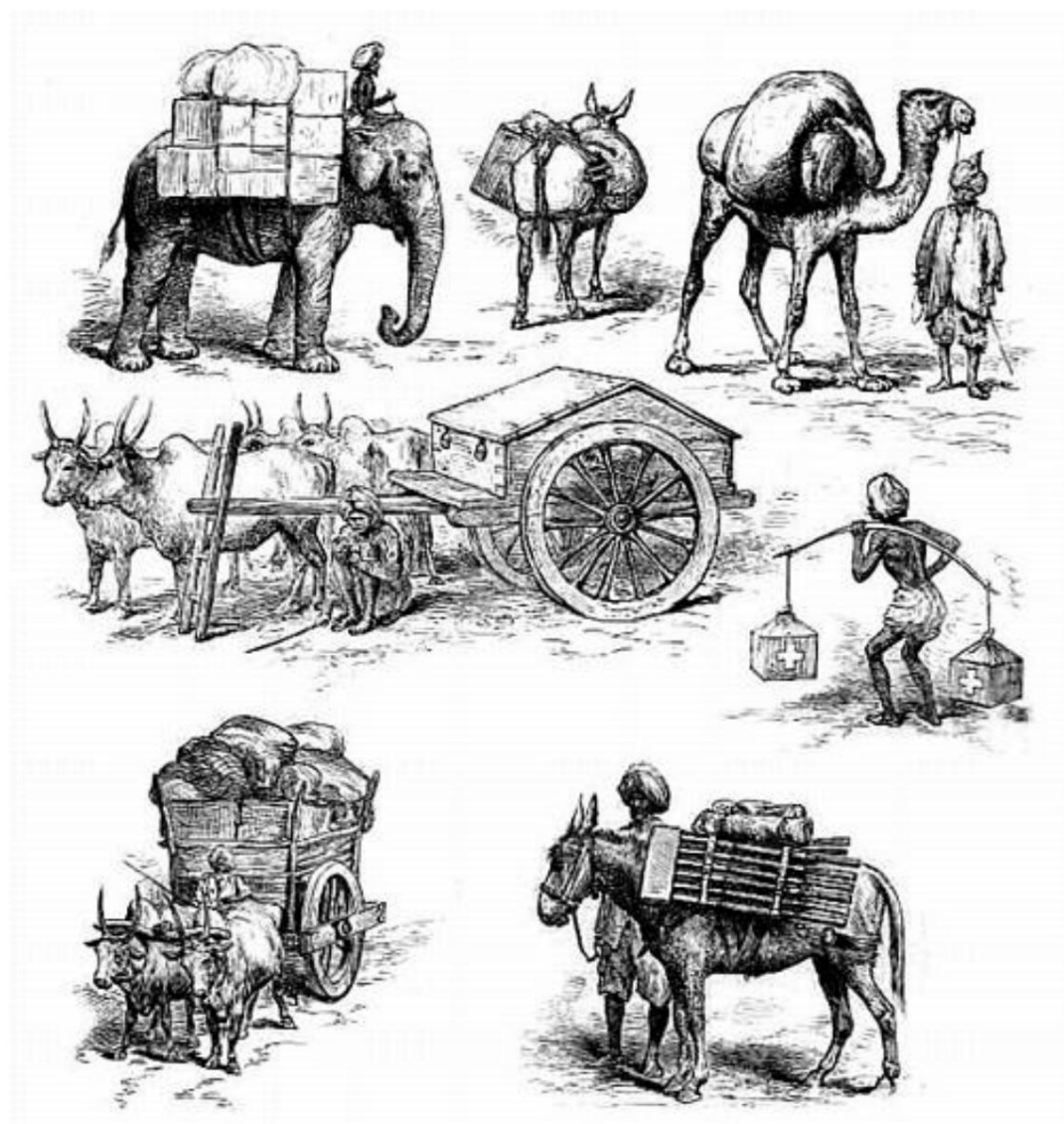


# The Indian Army - About training units under First World War - Part I

## Introduction

The conditions for military operations in the Indian Subcontinent were often difficult, and the operations often took place in rough terrain. The means of transport naturally had to be adapted to the current conditions, whether you were operating on flat plains or in mountainous terrain, and whether it was sharp operations or simply training or training activities.



*Some Indian Army supply methods, 1886.*

Extract of a plate from *the Illustrated London News*, 30 March 1886, found for sale on Ebay.

This drawing gives a good impression of the various means of transport which the Indian Army brought into service in supply service.

As far as I could tell, the drawings are based on observations made in connection with an exercise at Delhi.

Although the drawing shows means of transport from the late 1880s, basically no major changes had taken place in the run-up to the First World War.

Two means of transport, which are probably outside the scope of training units, but which were of great importance for the supply service during the war, are missing from the drawing, namely railways and ships. Both parts played a significant role in transport over long distances, including not least for the units that were sent to the fronts in France, Egypt, Mesopotamia and Africa as well as other areas where units of the Indian Army served.

The supply units rarely benefit from in-depth treatment in various works dealing with the Indian Army, which usually focus on the more spectacular aspects of the army, not least the brightly colored uniforms. The purpose of this paper is therefore to present some of the supply units that contributed to keeping the Indian Army in a fighting condition.

The supply service of the Indian army did not function in isolation, of course, all the while that the army was in principle only intended for combat in the home country and the nearest neighboring countries, and especially English supply units of all imaginable types also made great contributions in a wide range of areas. Sources about e.g. The Army Service Corps is therefore important in connection with studies of The Supply and Transport Corps, which was the name of the Indian supply troops.

## The Supply and Transport Corps



*Corps badge*

*Supply and Transport Corps.*

From Source 1.

### Historical summary

1810: Army Commissariat Departments (date of establishment 8 December)

1883: Bengal, Madras and Bombay Transport Departments are established 1887:

Units are brought together in the Commissariat and Transport Department 1901:

Supply and Transport Corps 1923: Indian

Army Service Corps 1935: Royal Indian

Army Service Corps From 1947: At India's

independence, the corps is divided into: Army Service Corps (India)

(from 1950)

Army Service Corps (Pakistan)



*Indian train on the march, escorted by soldiers of the 20th (Duke of Cambridge's Own) Punjab Infantry, c. 1897.*

Drawn by Richard Simkin. Reproduced from a plate, seen for sale at MILPRINTS.

As suggested by the unit's name, the function was twofold: Supply Service and Transport Service.

**The Supply Service** included the provision of rations to British units in India and to Indian units in certain garrisons, fodder and straw for animals financed by the Government of India, harness for draft and pack animals, and all manner of supplies, e.g. cookware, lamps and lamp oil, equipment for certain hospitals.

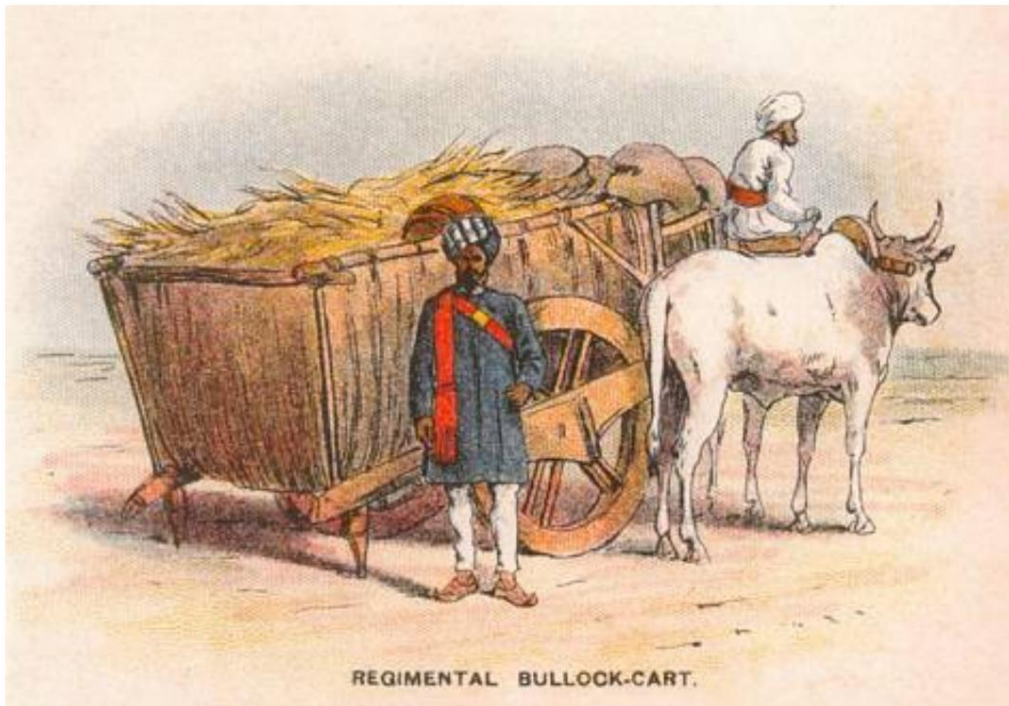
| Personnel in the transport service, 1914                                 | Number of personnel in the supply service, 1914 | Quantity                             |
|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| English officers   | 62 English officers                             | 197 English 76                       |
| English non-commissioned officers and privates                           | non-commissioned officers and privates          | 284                                  |
| Indian officers  | 66 Indian servants                              | 98 Assistants 2,848 <b>Total</b> 567 |
| Indian officials   |   | 2.931                                |
| Volunteer tree drivers ( <i>silladar sarwans</i> )                       |   | <b>3.858</b>                         |
| Indian Non-Commissioned Officers, Train Constables, Artisans and Helpers | 16.643  | (Source 3)                           |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>19.914</b>                                   |                                      |

The service was largely based on peacetime conditions and the corps operated a large number of depots at garrisons in India and Burma. The army's mobilization stocks were laid out in 9 depots in India.

In both the supply and transport services, a large number of civilian subcontractors were used, who made sure to deliver the supplies to the respective British and Indian units.

The military and paramilitary part of **the transport service** included the following units:

| Units with draft animals |   |  |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| Mule                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Source 3) 4 mule companies (<i>cavalry brigade corps</i>) 3 mule companies (cadres) (<i>cavalry brigade cadre</i>)</li> </ul> | When mobilizing, the following animals are available: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 28,949 mules (about 740 per unit) 12,816 camels (1,068 per unit) 3,642 oxen (about 50 per unit).</li> </ul> |
| Bulls                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 72 <i>haft-troops</i></li> </ul>   |  |
| Units with pack          |   |  |
| Mule                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>animals</b> 17 mule companies (<i>pack corps</i>) 15 mule companies (<i>pack cadre</i>)</li> </ul>                          |  |
| Camels                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 camel companion (<i>silladar camel corps</i>)</li> <li>• 4 camel companion (<i>grantee camel corps</i>)</li> </ul>           |  |



*Bullock cart, approx. 1897.*

Drawn by Richard Simkin. Reproduced from a postcard in a series published by Dorset Soldiers in 2005.

The detailed organization of the different types of companies does not appear from the sources, and the number of animals per unit in the statement presupposes an equal distribution.

Furthermore, there were a number of draft/pack animals, outside the framework of the training department, at certain brigades and regiments.

The corps was probably a military unit, but had a large civilian character. The commanders had no authority outside of the corps, just as the personnel were basically unarmed. These conditions were only changed with the creation of the Indian Army Service Corps in 1923, when the corps became an actual military unit on the lines of e.g. the engineer troops.

In 1914, the number of motor vehicles in India was modest, but during the war, units were formed which included Indian motor vehicle drivers. The British Army Service Corps, which before the war had not been part of the British Army in India, served the Indian Army with motor vehicles until 1928.

Before the First World War, few of the training units of the Indian Army existed, apart from the detachments



supply and baggage train, in peacetime. According to old tradition, the train was only set up when there was a need for it, and this improvised form was not beneficial for war skills.

## Imperial Service units

In British India, there were a large number of larger and smaller independent states, collectively referred to as *the Indian Princely States*.

27 of the regents from here made - under *the Imperial Service* scheme - their military forces available to the Central Government in case of war.

Units from 21 of these states served outside India during the First World War.



*Imperial Service Troops.*

Drawn by AC Lowett, 1910. Postcard from the National Army Museum, London.

From the left you can see:

1. 2nd Gwalior Lancer (*Mahratta*)
2. Patiala Rajindra Lancers (*Jat Sikhs*)
3. Kashmir Mountain Artillery (*Dogra (Hindu)*)
4. Kapurthala Infantry (*Jat Sikh*)
5. Alwar Infantry (*Shekhawat/ Musalman*)
6. Jihd Infantry (*Jat Sikh*)
7. Nabha Infantry (*Jat Sikh*)
8. Bharatpur Infantry (*Jat*)
9. Indore Transport Corps, Commandant (*Dekhani Musalman*)
10. Bahawalpur Mounted Rifles and Camel Corps Transport
11. Jaipur Transport Corps, Commandant (*Rajput*)
12. 1st Kashmir Infantry, Commandant (*Dogra (Hindu)*)
13. Sirmoor Sappers and Miners (*Brahman*)
14. Rampur Lancers (*Rohilla*)
15. 1st Hyderabad Lancers (*Mogul Musalman*)

The following overview of Imperial Service training units is not necessarily exhaustive in terms of campaigns, but gives the impression of a not inconsiderable contribution.

**Imperial Service training units**

**Field train (Source 1)**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Bahawalpur Transport Corps (Camels) North West Frontier | 1914-1919   |
| Bharatpur Transport Corps (Mules)                       | France 1914-15, Gallipoli 1915, Macedonia 1915-1918   |
| Gwalior Transport Corps (mules)                         | France 1914-15  |
| Indore Transport Corps (Mules)                          | France 1914-15, Gallipoli 1915, Egypt, Macedonia 1918 |
| Jaipur Transport Corps (Mules)                          | Mesopotamia 1914-1916                                 |
| Kolat Transport Corps (Camels)                          | Mesopotamia 1914-1916                                 |
| Khaipur Transport Corps (Camels)                        | Mesopotamia 1914-1916                                 |
| Las Bela Transport Corps (Camels)                       | Mesopotamia 1914-1916                                 |
| Mysore Transport Corps (perhaps pack horses)            | Mesopotamia 1916-1918                                 |

Source 2 estimates that the Imperial Service training units (in 1911) could muster 1,650 transport carts.



*Mysore Transport Corps (Musalman) and Mysore Lancers (Madrasi Musalman).*

Drawn by AC Lowett, 1910.

Postcard from the National Army Museum, London.

The closest I can get to the organization of these units is a statement in Source 18 showing how the Mysore Transport Corps was organized - in 1905.



The double-headed eagle (*garuda*) which forms part of the coat of arms of the Maharaja of Mysore.

Made after the squadron badge from No.

129 (Mysore) Squadron, Royal Air Force.

One of the images in Source 18 of the memorial to The Mysore Imperial Service Troops in Bangalore shows this mark, which may be a common mark of Mysore units.

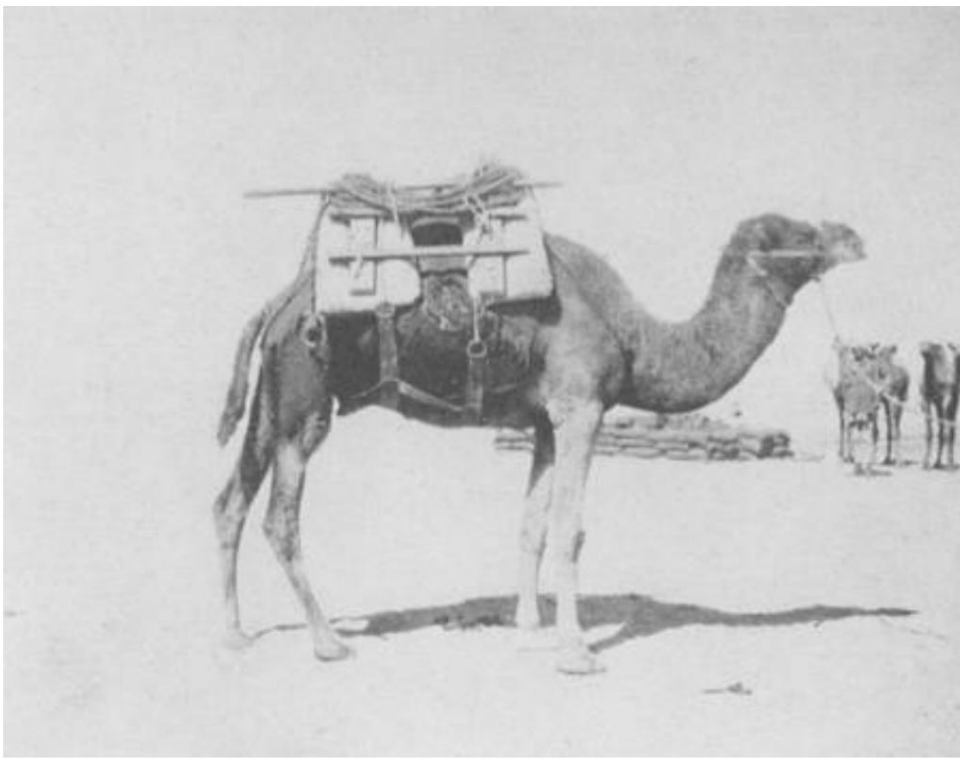
| <b>Mysore Imperial Service Transport Corps (1905)</b> (Kilde 18)            |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Headquarters C Section</b> Lieutenant-Colonel R.G. Jones ( <i>Chef</i> ) | Jamadar Mahmoud Fazel ( <i>Chef</i> )                               |
| RW Simpson ( <i>Second in Command</i> ) (?)                                 | Jemadar Mahomed Ishaq ( <i>Næstkommanderende</i> ) <b>D Section</b> |
| Ibraham Sharief <i>Adjutant</i> AT  |   |
| Theyagaraj <i>Intendant</i> Risaldar Syed Abdul Guffar ( <i>Chef</i> )      |   |
| <b>A Section</b> Jemadar Narainsawmy Naidu ( <i>Næstkommanderende</i> )     |   |
| Risaldar (Lieutenant) Sheik Sudaroonden <b>E Section</b> ( <i>Chief</i> )   | Unknown ( <i>Boss</i> )   |
| Jemadar Arokiam ( <i>Second in Command</i> )                                | Jemadar Mahomed Azeem Khan ( <i>Second in Command</i> )             |
| <b>B Section</b>  |   |
| Risaldar Mir Abbas Ally ( <i>Chef</i> )                                     |   |
| Jemadar Furzalla Khan   |   |
| ( <i>Second in Command</i> )  |   |

The grades of *Risaldar* and *Jemadar* correspond almost to first lieutenant and lieutenant respectively.

The missing information in the overview was obtained via the source's owner, Ronnie Johnson in Bangalore, who unfortunately has not been able to shed more light on the matter.

### Personnel and animals

Source 2 states that the majority of the army's coachmen, mules and camels originate from the Punjab. The personnel are either from the same population groups that are recruited into many of the infantry regiments (those who do not have the stature to be recruited into the infantry) or from the area's smaller (dominant) population groups.



Locally made pack saddle, according to official pattern, Egypt, 1917.  
From Source 5.

The tree drivers of the volunteer camel corps (*silladar* and *grantee*) are from the Muslim tribes - Baluch, Jat, and others - who inhabit the areas between the great rivers Ravi, Jhelum, Chenab and Indus. These owners of camels are described as wild-looking and colorful, with long hair, and almost as enigmatic as their animals...

Source 5 states that in 1910 the Indian Army was still considering what the perfect pack saddle should look like.

Both in peacetime and after the mobilization in 1914, a number of different types were used.

I assume the Indian pack saddles looked something like this Egyptian version.



Indian Mule Corps, France, 1914.

From a contemporary French postcard.

Unfortunately I am not aware of which device is pictured in this and the following ones quite intriguing



postcard.

It may be a training unit from one of the two Indian cavalry divisions - *1st Indian Cavalry Division* *2nd Indian Cavalry* and *Division* - which from autumn 1914 to spring 1918 operated on the Western Front.

The closest I can get to information about training units in the two cavalry divisions is Source 8, which states the following:

| <b>1st Indian Cavalry Division</b> Pr.   | <b>2nd Indian Cavalry Division</b> (Source 8)   |
|--|---|
| 28. september 1915 Army Service Corps med: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● 426th &amp; 577th Company</li><li>● 79th Company (Motorized Ammunition Park) 89th</li><li>● Company (Motorized Supply Column)</li></ul> | Pr. 28. september 1915 Army Service Corps med: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● 83rd &amp; 427th Company</li><li>● 71st Company (Motorized Supply Column) 72nd</li><li>● Company (Motorized Ammunition Park)</li></ul> |

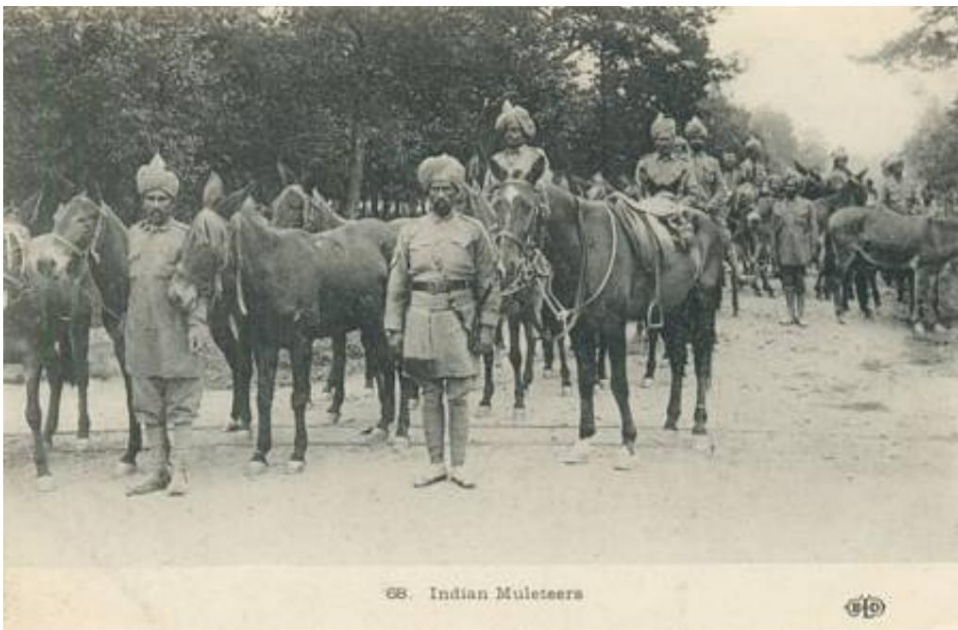


*Indian Mule Corps, France, 1914.*

From a contemporary French postcard, in the same series as the previous one.

Some units must have served the cavalry before 28 September 1914, but which ones my sources report nothing about.

The card on the left is postmarked October 22, 1914 and sent from Orleans to an address in France.



*Indian Mule Corps, France, 1914.*

From a contemporary French postcard.

The image shows the same unit as the previous two cards, but this card is only issued in England.



*English soldiers, France, 1914.*

From a contemporary French postcard.

The picture appears to have been taken in the same location as the previous ones, and perhaps, as the text suggests, it is of English infantrymen.

What I can decipher from their regimental badges, however, rather indicates that it could be the Supply and Transport Corps or the Army Service Corps, whereby the soldiers could belong to the same unit as the previous Indian soldiers.

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**To note:**

- 1) Read about the history of the Indian railways here - Indian Railways (Wikipedia).
- 2) See 200 years of dedicated support (Daily Excelsior). Searches in the newspaper's database show that today's Army Service Corps (India) traces its traditions back to 1760.
- 3) On the regiment, see The Indian Army 1910-1940 - On the Infantry, Part 2.
- 4) The owners of the camels received a sum of money for serving a number of days annually with their camels. (Source 2) From *silahdar* (Urdu), where the word means squire; originally *silah* (Arabic), where the word means weapon.
- 5) By doing service with their camels a number of days per year, the owners repaid the value of a piece of land allotted to them (in the Punjab). (Source 2) From *grant* (English), which i.a. means government subsidy.
- 6) See List of Indian Princely States (Wikipedia).
- 7) Derived from Silladar 823 Ramzan receiving the Corps *Service Star* and the Bahawalpur State *North West Frontier Service Medal 1914-1919*. Mentioned in catalog from English auction house Harpers' catalog Summer/Autumn 2004. Examples of medals from Bahawalpur can be seen on Q&C Militaria's website - Medals to Indian State Forces.
- 8) The units from Bharatpur, Gwalior and Indore constitute in 1919 <sup>st</sup> *Imperial Draught Mule Corps*. See Medals 1 of the Third Afghan War, 1919 (Edward S. Haynes).
- 9) See Macedonia 1915-1918 (Land Forces of Britain, the Empire and the Commonwealth).
- 10) See Mysore (Royal and Ruling Houses of Africa, Asia, Oceania and the Americas). A garuda (Wikipedia) is a mythological animal from the Hindu religion.
- 11) The squadron insignia is from Air of Authority - A History of RAF Organisation. The squadron was equipped for funds raised in India, see The Indian Gift Squadrons (Bharat Rakshak).