

CHAPTER XII

THE KINGDOM OF NEPAL¹

IN the southern ranges of the Himalayas and north of two Indian provinces, called respectively "Bengal" and "United Provinces of Agra and Oudh," lies the little independent kingdom of Nepal. It is a narrow tract of country extending for about 520 miles along the southern slope of the central axis of the Himalayas. It has an area of 54,000 square miles with a population of about six millions, chiefly Hindus. The average annual revenue is now estimated at about £1,100,000, but it is probably a good deal more.

This state enjoys complete independence, and has at its capital (Katmandu) a British envoy, whose chief duties are connected with correspondence relating to the Gurkhas who enlist in the Indian Army, and serve as mercenaries under an oath of allegiance to our King-Emperor. The term "Gurkha" is now the national designation of the inhabitants of this country, but it was originally limited to a people occupying a district of the same name, and situated in the centre of the present kingdom. That is to say, *the term does not denote a race*, but simply a follower of the King of Gurkha in the old days.

About 1765, the King of "Gurkha"—one Prithwi Narain—made his second invasion of Nepal proper, and after some four years' hostilities, conquered the whole valley and established his capital at Katmandu. For the next thirty years the Gurkha was engaged in almost

¹ As regards this and the following chapter, I have to acknowledge the kindness of the Committee of the Royal United Service Institution in allowing me to include in them some portions of an article I wrote for their journal in December, 1906.

continual fighting for conquest. Sikkim was overrun and a large portion annexed. Thibet was invaded, and much loot and plunder were acquired.

In 1792 a Chinese army managed, with great difficulty, to penetrate into Nepal, and actually dictated terms near the capital. But the damage inflicted by the invaders must have been small, for in the next two years the Gurkhas, striking westward, subdued and annexed the petty States of Kumaon and Garhwal. Indeed, so great was their prowess, and so many and so vast were their conquests, that in 1795 they were masters of all the hills and valleys from Bhutan to Kashmir, and from British India to Thibet.

At this time they showed little or no consideration for boundaries ; nor would they listen to any friendly remonstrances from their neighbours. So intolerable did the incessant pillaging in our territory, and encroachments on our frontier become that, in 1814, Lord Hastings, unable to endure it any longer, declared war against Nepal. After a six months' campaign, during which the Gurkhas behaved with the greatest gallantry and determination, the war came to an end owing to the skilful operations of General Ochterlony.

Peace, however, was not yet assured. The Nepal Government would not accede to our demands, and it took a second campaign, under the same capable leader, to bring about the Treaty of Segowli, which was signed in 1814 and ratified the following year. This treaty defines British relations with Nepal at the present day, except that a legation has now been established at the capital of our allies, instead of the old-time Resident.

But before this treaty was ratified at all, Gurkha soldiers began to troop to our colours, as military service is what they adore. In 1815 the first, second and third Gurkhas were raised at Subathu (Simla hills), Sirmoor (near Dehra Dun) and Almora (Kumaon) respectively. In 1857 the 4th Gurkhas were raised at Pithoragarh (beyond Almora on the western border of Nepal), and a year later the 5th, at Abbottabad. The other regiments were some of them formed in the early part of the last century, but were not designated "Gurkhas" until 1886 or later.

Many accounts are given in the official handbook on Gurkhas—originally compiled by Colonel Eden Vansittart

of the 5th and then 10th—about the extraordinary valour repeatedly shown by them in the Nepal wars. Tales which show that not only were they the bravest and cleanest fighters, but had a wonderful confidence in the good feeling and rectitude of the British.

Quite close to Dehra Dun, the permanent home of the 2nd and 9th Gurkha regiments, is a ruined fort, very strongly posted, called Kalinga. It was held in the first war by a Nepalese warrior named Balbhadar and 600 Gurkhas. General Gillespie with exceeding rashness—as he had no heavy guns—unsuccessfully attacked this fort, and was himself killed leading the first assault. The second assault was also repulsed, and altogether Balbhadar caused us a loss of thirty-one officers and 750 men killed and wounded. When ultimately three days' incessant shelling compelled the Gurkhas to leave, Balbhadar and the survivors, reduced to ninety, cut their way through our posts and escaped. The defence of this fort retarded a whole division for over a month.

One day, while shelling was in progress, a Gurkha was seen in the breach advancing towards the British, and waving his hand. The guns ceasing fire, the man came calmly into our lines to ask for medical assistance as his jaw had been shattered by a round shot. When he left hospital he openly declared that he was going back to fight against us once more, and did so!

With reference to these campaigns, it is extremely interesting to note that General Bruce—whom I refer to later on—got hold of a diary written by an officer who took part in them, and found that “Gurkha *snipers*” were continually referred to. Perhaps the first use of that particular term.

Writing of General Bruce reminds me that *he*, with his extraordinary knowledge of Gurkhas, should really be writing these two chapters and not *I*. However, I have done the next best thing, viz., freely consulted him, and I am greatly indebted for much information and many stories from his pen, or told me personally, which appear in these pages.

His Majesty the King of Nepal is called the “Maharaj Adhiraj” and, being too sacred a personality to be troubled with mundane affairs, he takes no share in the administration of the State, which is ruled by the Prime Minister.



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**BRIGADIER-GENERAL THE HONBLE. C. G. BRUCE, C.B., M.V.O.,
LATE 5TH ROYAL AND 6TH GURKHAS AND OF MOUNT EVEREST FAME.**

The King is nominally the head, but since the appointment, over a hundred years ago, of Bhim Sen Thapa as Prime Minister, all the power has been wielded by the holder of that office. This Bhim Sen ruled the Gurkha dynasty with great ability for more than twenty-five years. Many attempts were made by the reigning monarch to secure absolute power, with a final result that, about 1840, Bhim Sen either committed suicide, or was murdered in prison. Some six years later a general massacre of the most powerful nobles brought the famous Chieftain Sir Jung Bahadur to the front, and he obtained from the sovereign the perpetual right to the office of Prime Minister of Nepal. This right is still enjoyed by his descendant. Under Bhim Sen's rule an offer was made (1848) to assist us in the second Sikh War, but declined. Later (1857), during the troublous times of the Mutiny, a similar offer was accepted, and over 10,000 troops, with the Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief at their head, fought for us against the rebels.

The Nepal Army is roughly estimated at 50,000 men, of which a total of about 2,500 is artillery. Service is compulsory for at least three years, after which it is optional to remain on. The Nepal Government have given every facility during the last thirty years or so for the enlistment of Gurkhas in the Indian Army. This recruitment does not affect the supply for the Nepalese units. Formerly many impediments were placed in the path of our recruiters by the Nepal Durbar. Our men had first of all to make a long stay on the Indian border to enable them to grow their hair, and thus pass as ordinary villagers. Whispered enticements in the ear of a likely looking boy at some local fair led to midnight trysts in a lonely jungle. Here the keen recruiter, mustering his batch for the onward journey, travelled only by night, until the British frontier was reached.

After the successor to the great Jung Bahadur had been duly assassinated, came an enlightened Prime Minister in the person of Sir Bir Shum Shere Rana, and he eventually removed every restriction. For years our men have gone in freely, and provided, annually, from 1,500 to 2,000 men to meet all requirements. For this we also have to thank Lord Roberts, as it was mainly due to his influence and energy that this free enlistment was permitted. So

great was the Field-Marshal's admiration for Gurkhas that he chose one as a "supporter" on the left of his coat-of-arms.

The origin of the Gurkha is undoubtedly Mongolian. His appearance shows it pretty clearly. The nation consists of many tribes and clans, but the classes enlisted in our Army before the war were almost entirely *Gurungs*, *Magars*, *Thakurs*, and *Khas*, with *Eastern Nepal* men (i.e. *Rais*, *Limbus*, *Sunwars*, and *Lamas*) for the 7th and 10th Gurkhas.

My first experience of *Eastern Nepal* men was when Lord Kitchener selected me to raise the 2/7th at Quetta in 1907. *Limbus* and *Rais* were supposed to be bad tempered and difficult to manage. This idea got about because no battalion had, formerly, more than a very small percentage of them. Having been the latest converts to strict Hinduism, it is possible that in moments of excitement and passion, the other classes reviled them regarding their former indiscretions. This would raise any Gurkha's ire, and the *Limbu* or *Rai*, seeing red, probably whipped out his kukric (long, broad-bladed, curved knife) or bayonet, and went for his calumniator. Hence his reputation.

I found them exceedingly good-tempered, and particularly intelligent. Much more so than any other class. I must mention, however, that at first I found such difficulty in getting my orders obeyed, especially as regards gambling and the illicit brewing of alcohol, that I had to punish very heavily, and convene a large number of courts-martial. So much so that, first of all, my brigadier (now General Sir F. J. Aylmer, V.C.) talked to me about it, but was quite satisfied with my explanation.

Then my second-in-command, who had served with *Eastern Nepal* men in Burma, warned me, with much solemnity, that I was riding for a fall. Asking why, he explained that I could not discipline the *Limbu* and *Rai*, and that if these heavy punishments for disobedience of orders were persisted in, I should have a sort of mutiny. I gave him clearly to understand that it was my intention to continue as I had begun, that ill-discipline in the battalion could not be tolerated for a moment, and that if I failed I was prepared to face the consequences.

Like the good fellow he was, he gave me his whole-

hearted support, and after another three months we had no more trouble at all. Six years later, when this officer took over the command, the letter he wrote regarding the condition of the unit, and its discipline, is one I often re-read with pride.

The *Magars* and *Gurungs* are to be found chiefly in Central Nepal, and are aborigines of the country and of the old district of "Gurkha." They have been warriors, pure and simple, from the very earliest times. When not employed fighting, the energy of the Magar tribe has been mainly devoted to agricultural pursuits, and that of the Gurungs to pastoral work.

The *Thakur* and *Khas* (or Chettris, as they prefer to be called) tribes are of the highest social standing in Nepal. The *Thakurs* indeed reigned in the old kingdom of *Gurkha*, and were descended from the *Rajputs*, who took refuge in Nepal after the first siege of Chitor.¹ The Nepalese Royal family is in a straight line from the old *Gurkha* Kings. In fact the present "Maharaj Adhiraj" is the *Gurkha* King himself direct.

The Gurkhas have a very strong sense of their obligations when on duty. More zealous sentries it would be difficult to find. Sometimes this creates an awkward situation. At Dacca, on one occasion, a Gurkha sentry shot at and wounded a perfectly innocent member of the municipal committee. This man had every right to be where he was, and had answered the challenge by shouting out "Friend." Still the Gurkha fired at the city father. At the enquiry his defence was that the man, not being a *soldier*, could not possibly be a *friend*!

One ancient custom I must briefly refer to as regards violation of the laws of marriage by a man with another man's wife, to whom the latter had been properly married, i.e. by what is called the "Biaiti"² ceremony. (Many, if they can afford it, have other wives, who do not count in the same way.)

By the law of the land the husband of this wife was permitted to have one cut with his kukrie at the accused, if convicted by the court. This "cutting" took place in full ceremonial, and if the man tried to bolt, he would

¹ *Chitor* in Rajputana : four times taken and sacked by Mohammedan kings and emperors between 1303 and 1567 (Akbar).

² Properly *byāh*.

be tripped-up by the spectators. There was only one way he could get off, and that was to so humiliate himself as to crawl between the straddled legs of the injured husband.

In recent years this law has been abolished, and a system of fines substituted, varying from 120 to 5 rupees. In addition, all property, ornaments, dowry, etc., have to be returned to the husband.

When the present reductions in the Indian infantry are completed, we shall have ten Gurkha regiments of two battalions each, or a force of about 18,000 men. Of these, the 9th Regiment enlists Khas, the 7th and 10th Limbus and Rais, and the remainder almost entirely Magars and Gurungs. Of course during the war units had to take what they could get, and many rather undesirable classes were enlisted, but most of these have by now been eliminated.

Allured by every prospect of employment in the field, our service is extremely popular. Doubtless the men are not blind to the advantages of good and regular pay, and the fairly liberal pension establishment. But the boy-villagers noting, with envy and admiration, the bemedalled veterans settling in their midst, are mainly attracted by the hope of fighting for the "Sarkar"—the name they give to the British Government.

After joining Head-quarters it is astonishing to note how quickly they learn to reverence the King-Emperor, whom they look upon with much veneration. Our barrack-rooms are full of coloured prints of the Royal family, and the most acceptable gift you can make to a non-commissioned officer's room are pictures of our reigning monarch and his consort.

On the outbreak of the Great War, the present ruler of Nepal¹ threw in his lot with the British at once, and immediately placed all the military resources of his State at the disposal of the British Government, for the defence of India and India's frontiers.

Here it is necessary to explain that according to the religious usage of Nepal it is obligatory for any soldier crossing the *Kalapani* (black waters of the sea) to obtain

¹General His Highness Maharajah Sir Chandra Shum Shere Jung, Bahadur Rana, G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., D.C.L. (Oxon), Prime Minister and Marshal of Nepal.

a special dispensation on return, before he can enter Nepal or have any intercourse with Nepalese, even with the members of his own family. This dispensation is called *pani pathya* (purification ceremony), and is looked on as being of extreme importance. The penalty for evading it is excommunication of the severest type, for the man becomes an absolute pariah, his own relations refusing to eat, drink, or smoke with him. This is described by our men as *hugqa pani band* (lit. smoking and water stopped).

The supreme religious authority in Nepal has to be consulted in such matters, and, as regards the Great War, the question was a very big one on account of the enormous number of Gurkha soldiers in our army proceeding overseas to France, Gallipoli, Egypt, Mesopotamia, East Africa, Palestine, etc. Fortunately for us the influence of the present Prime Minister is so great that the priesthood consented to grant this dispensation to all—except pure Brahmans—under certain conditions. Firstly, it had to be active service under the orders, or with the consent of the Nepal Government. Secondly, there was to be no tarrying abroad longer than was necessary. Thirdly, each man was to bring back convincing proofs, signed by a competent British officer, of having upheld the prescribed caste observances throughout.

Sir Chandra showed great forethought over this, and also his usual solicitude for his people who would otherwise have been put to much trouble, expense and humiliation. But this was not all, for he persuaded the spiritual head in Nepal to depute a representative to Dehra Dun and other places used as centres for this grant of *patia*. Moreover, representatives were despatched to Gurkha stations on behalf of the families of soldiers who had died overseas, and for whom this dispensation was also necessary in connection with after-death ceremonies.

It was on account of the difficulties regarding this purification ceremony that the contingent of the Nepal army was proposed for the defence of India and India's frontiers only. This did not involve any crossing of the sea.

At first the offer was not accepted, because of the many difficulties regarding command, employment, training, etc. Early in 1915, however, the Government of India, finding itself in great straits for reliable troops, welcomed the

suggestion with open arms, asking for contingents of six thousand men as early as possible. For these camp accommodation was provided at Dehra Dun (2,000) and near Abbottabad (4,000). This strength was increased a year later by two more battalions to each station, making a total of over ten thousand.

I happened to arrive at Dehra Dun as brigade commander, in April, 1915, about the same time as the first two battalions, 1,060 strong each, and at once took their training in hand. As the men, though of good physique and possessing a knowledge of ceremonial combined with a fine soldierly spirit, had never lived together in camp or barracks before, nor done any field training; and moreover the officers and N.C.O.s, though keen and zealous, had received little professional instruction or schooling, it was rather a puzzle how to ensure a good start and make rapid progress.

A brain wave gave me the inspiration of "practical demonstrations." Taking up the idea at once, my excellent Territorial battalions and the good old 2nd Gurkhas were daily utilised to give exhibitions to the Nepalese officers and N.C.O.s. Every description of military training from physical exercises to night operations and, later on, attack and defence with ball, was demonstrated, and all with the most gratifying and surprising results.

I found General Tej Shum Shere¹ in command of the two very strong battalions at Dehra Dun. He was an earnest soldier, who backed me up in all my endeavours, being as anxious to advance his own professional knowledge as he was to absorb all we could teach regarding sanitation and hygiene. This up to date had been to him a closed book.

When transferred later to Abbottabad, I found there four equally strong units under General Padma Shum Shere² who proved himself always a shrewd and zealous helpmate, ready in every way to take infinite trouble to further the fitness and proficiency of his officers and men. The Inspector-Generalship of the Nepalese forces in India was in the capable hands of the second son³ of the Prime

¹ Now General Sir Tej Shum Shere, Jung, Bahadur Rana, K.C.I.E.

² Now Commanding-General Sir Padma Shum Shere, Jung, Bahadur Rana, G.B.E., K.C.I.E.

³ Now General Sir Baber Shum Shere, Jung, Bahadur Rana, G.B.E., K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E.



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**GENERAL SIR BABER SHUM SHERE, JUNG, BAHADOOR RANA, G.B.E.,
K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E., NEPALESE ARMY.**

Minister. This officer remained with army head-quarters, making periodical visits to Dehra Dun and Abbottabad for purposes of inspection. At Simla and Delhi he was most useful, and was freely consulted in all questions concerning the contingents. With him I formed a close, and I hope a lasting, friendship, and I am full of admiration for his soldierly qualities and brave spirit.

Attached to each contingent were supervising British officers with four or five British sergeants per battalion. On these devolved tasks requiring a considerable amount of hard work, combined with a good professional knowledge, and more than a little tact. I shall always feel I owe them a deep debt of gratitude. I am certain also that the enormous strides made, in so short a time, by the Nepalese, were due as much to their fostering care, as to the zeal and keenness of the troops themselves. An opinion shared, I feel sure, by His Highness the Maharajah.

In January, 1920, the Government of India offered to the Nepal Government an annual present of ten lacs¹ of rupees as a "mark of appreciation of the attitude adopted by Nepal during the war, as a recognition of the sacrifices which have been made, and in the hope that the gift will not only further strengthen the ties of friendship which have existed for so long, but will add to the power and prosperity of Nepal."

According to Nepalese official returns the total male adult population is just under one million, and the number of men taken out of the country for all purposes connected with the war from 1914 to 1920 reached the enormous figure of over two hundred thousand.

Money contributions reached the large amount of over a million and a quarter rupees, of which over a fifth were from Sir Chandra's private purse. Again, in 1915, on the King's birthday Nepal presented to His Majesty thirty-one Vickers-Maxim machine guns.

The Prime Minister looked on the war as if it was his own, and his efforts to provide more and more man-power were prodigious. But nothing less could be expected from one who has proved himself for many years such a successful ruler, and so staunch an ally to the British Empire. His influence has never waned, indeed his authority has increased

¹ At 1s. 8d. exchange = £83,333.

with time, and the present prosperity of the country is due to his sagacity, energy and foresight.

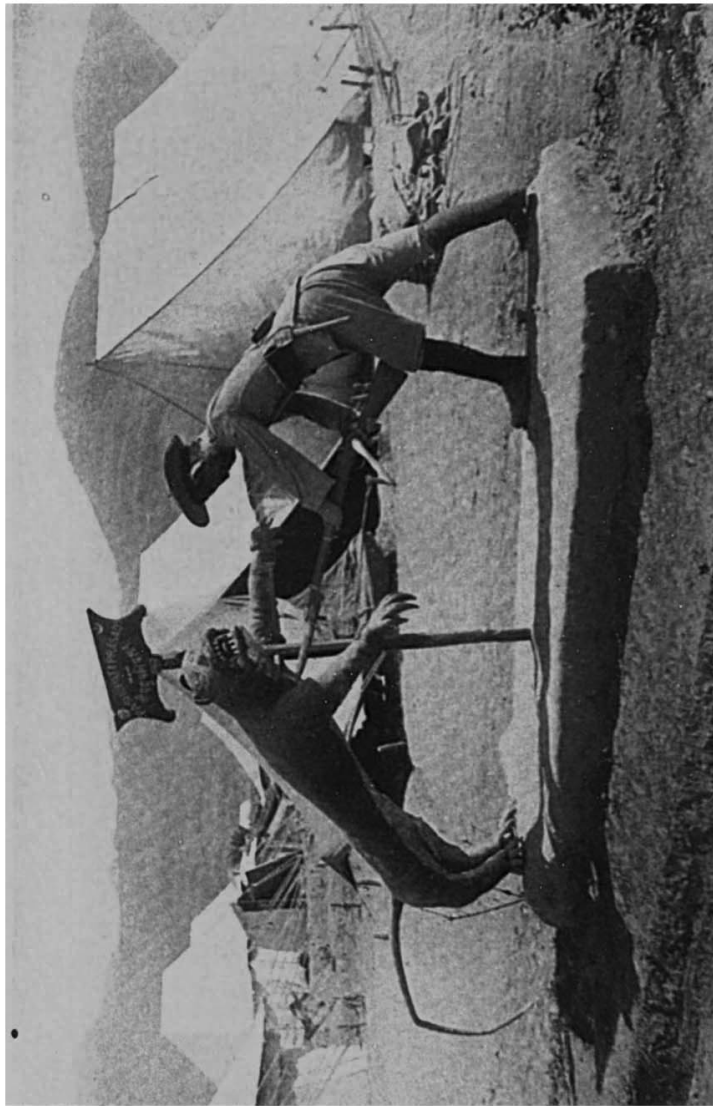
The host of our King-Emperor in 1911 in the famous jungles of Nepal, he has been much looking forward to the present month when he acts in a similar capacity to the Prince of Wales.¹

I have already mentioned my friendship with his second son, and would like to relate a personal incident connected with the innate good feeling of this gallant officer. Our dear son, having been one of the British officers attached to the Nepal contingent at Dehra Dun, had been photographed in a group of Nepalese and British officers. Some months after our boy was killed, General Baber, calling on me at Abbottabad, said, at the end of the interview, that he had a group photograph for my wife, mentioning what it was. Thanking him, I rather expected him to bring it out of his pocket. Nothing appeared, however, until evening when a coolie arrived with a large case containing an immense framed and glazed enlargement of the group. We were extremely touched at the kind thought which prompted our friend to make this gift, and at his consideration in bringing it himself all the way from Simla. When three years later he suffered the loss of his own eldest son, Bala Shum Shere, aged thirteen, we felt, in our deep sympathy, that this sad loss was another bond between us.

To set in motion the training of the Dehra Dun contingent, before I left it in the capable hands of Colonel Lord Radnor, and to perfect the military education of the remainder of the 10,000 at Abbottabad, was work entirely after my own heart. With any troops it would have been congenial, but connected, as it was, with a nation which had always so much attracted me, and in intimate relations with an inspector-general and commanders who were so responsive to every hint, or demand, made it a real pleasure.

The Prime Minister took an enormous interest in the progress and welfare of his men, which gave me the opportunity for some correspondence with him. In my zeal I suggested certain innovations regarding promotions, etc., some of which were agreed to, and others unacceptable. To give effect to the former meant increased expenditure,

¹ Written December, 1921.



Staff Sgt. Pitt

NEPALESE EFFIGY, MADE OF WOOD AND CLAY, IS FRONT OF QUARTER-GUARD OF PASU PATHI PRASAD BATTALION
OF NEPAL CONTINGENT AT AMBOLIABAD, 1915-1919.

necessitating a reference by me to army headquarters. The result was a letter from the Chief of the General Staff asking for an explanation as to how this matter had originated. On getting my reply that it was my own brain wave transferred to His Highness by letter post, I received a mild wiggling, and a reminder that all communications with Nepal must be made through the Foreign and Political Department of the Government of India. The letter added that I had usurped functions far beyond my province, and, indeed, functions which even His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief could not exercise! The main point, however, to me was, that all my proposals were sanctioned.

The contingents remained under canvas for over four years, and it speaks much for the attachment and fortitude of our Nepalese Allies that, during all that long period, they never faltered, simply concentrating their attention on their own efficiency, and delighted with the opportunity given some of the battalions of seeing service on the North-West Frontier. One must remember too that it was only possible to house the officers very poorly, just as our own had to fare during the exigencies and overcrowding of the war. Even General Padma, accustomed in his home to a marble palace, electric light and every convenience, had a small subaltern's tin-roofed quarter; yet I never heard one word of complaint.

Much interest was taken in the sanitation and cleanliness of the camps, and units vied with one another in ornamentation and the like. Weird and grotesque figures were constructed of clay and wood near all quarter guards, symbolic of the name of the battalion, Hindu divinities, etc. Ornate creations apparently peculiar to Nepal, for I have never seen them anywhere else. I reproduce one of these.

In 1917 the Government of Nepal instituted two Orders for the first time in Nepalese history. One was for the rank and file, and the other a higher order styled "The Star of Nepal," and divided into four classes, with the highest carrying the title of "Supradipta Manyabār" (The Most Honourable Honourable). It was with extreme gratification that I heard in 1920 that the Nepal Government had conferred on me the honour of this "Star of Nepal" (Second Class), with the title of "Pradipta

Manyabār " (The Right Honourable Honourable) in recognition of the supervision I had given to the welfare and training of the contingents. The King's authority having appeared in the *London Gazette* for the unrestricted use of the insignia at all times when medals and decorations are worn, enables me to show, with pride, this mark of esteem from the gallant little nation I so much admire.