Colonel L.W. Shakespear in his *History of the Assam Rifles* writes that from 1830 the armed civil police had been gradually increased, and with the reduction of the troops the idea of a Levy or Militia was put forward to be a separate force under the Civil Government and apart from the armed civil police. The first unit of this organisation, he added, was 'definitely raised' by Grange during 1833 and was named the 'Cachar Levy' with a strength of 750 of all ranks, viz. 'inspectors, headconstables and constables'. Shakespear's conclusions are unacceptable on two grounds: firstly, the facts stated are contrary to all documentary evidence, secondly, there was no uniform organisation for the defence of the frontiers throughout the period under review. The Military Police Battalions were the outcome of numerous experiments to protect the frontiers. Frontier defence was organised according to the exigencies of the situation and with regard to the peculiarities of the climate and geography of the North-East Frontier.

In the beginning the problem was concerned mainly with

the defence against another Burmese invasion. The climate of
the Assam frontier was so inhospitable to the upcountry sepoys
of the Regular Regiments of the Line, and the service so inju-
rious to their discipline, that the defence of the province was
entrusted to Local Corps. With the emergence of the problem of
the hill tribes since 1826, frontier defence gradually became
interlinked with tribal policy. The frontier tribes were often
conciliated but at times they were coerced by military measures
for raids into the plains. Punitive expeditions and blockades
were occasionally resorted to; but to defend the frontier a chain
of military posts had at all times to be maintained. These posts
were situated in such unhealthy localities that it was found
impossible to employ regimental units other than irregulars of
the country to garrison them. Further, these rough and ready
irregulars were found admirably suited for the petty border war-
fare against the hill tribes. The idea of irregulars, or levy or
militia or sebundies, as they were variously called, for frontier
defence was put forward not in 1830, as suggested by Colonel
Shakespear, but much earlier. Locally recruited militia corps
were frequently employed in localities where the climate was
prejudicial to the health of upcountry sepoys. Such a militia

History of Assam, P. 331.
was uniformly kept up on the Garo frontiers since the close of
the preceding century. In 1815 David Scott, the Magistrate of
Rangpur, examined the possibility of raising a frontier militia
on the same frontier, similar to one raised by Augustus Cleve­
land in Bhagalpur in 1790\(^1\). Again, it was with this object that
he settled the Shans or Burmese settlers at Singimari in 1825. The
Shan irregulars and sebundies were widely used for the defence
of frontiers of Lower Assam since 1828. In 1835 the sebundies
were organised into a single body as the Assam Sebundy Corps.
By the formation of the Second Assam Sebundy Corps, after the
Khamti insurrection in 1839, the policy of raising irregulars
was fully extended to Upper Assam. It was at the same time deter­
mined to withdraw the Local Corps from the frontier in order to
concentrate them in the rear and render them disposable for
emergencies only. When this policy failed the Local Corps were
entrusted with the duties of the front line or line of defence
in 1844. The multiplication of the frontier posts, some of which
were again located in unhealthy areas, and the necessity of a
disposable force in reserve made this policy impracticable. Police
Militia, or irregulars, developed in consequence and by 1852 the
policy was once again reversed. As a result of a general Police
reform in India the Militia were abolished in 1862 and the men

\(^1\) Barooah, N.K.: *David Scott in North East India*, P. 46.
incorporated into the Constabulary. The Local Corps were converted into Regular Regiments during the reorganisation of the Bengal army following the Mutiny. In 1864 a new policy was adopted when the defence of the frontier was entrusted to combined detachments of Regulars, and armed police. The ill-effects of frontier outpost duties on the Regulars, as evidenced in the Diwangiri disaster, again led to a change in the system. The local authorities also found it more convenient to have a civil force for the defence of the frontier and to give effect to the policy of establishing strong posts in the hills. It was therefore decided in 1866 to entrust the defence of the frontier to an armed Frontier Police, supported by the Regulars stationed in the principal stations in the plains. Although changes occurred from time to time in the organisation of the Frontier Police and the Regiments the new policy continued unchanged.

Throughout the period under review endeavours were made to recruit the hill tribes for the defence of the frontier. In order to make the Local Corps independent of all recruitment from outside the province, its ranks were thrown open to the Manipuris, Jurwas and other bordering tribes. Its strict discipline proved to be the chief obstacle to the tribes entering the service in a large scale. Although Gurkhas and Hindustanis were subsequently freely recruited, the corps contained a good propor-
tion of local soldiers and the Sylhet Light Infantry was later cited as a model for the recruitment of tribes of the Punjab Frontier. It was with the irregulars that the question of recruiting hill tribes is more closely connected. Notwithstanding the practical advantages of enlisting men suited for jungle warfare and inured to the climate for frontier defence, there were often political objects involved. Altruistic motives of civilising the tribes by such employment was also not totally absent. The success of tribal levies depended on the character, customs and susceptibilities of the tribes. The democratic character of the Angamis made the prospect of an Angami Naga Militia extremely bleak. The success of the Shan Militia, Khamti Militia and Kuki Levy, on the other hand, was entirely due to the fact that they were accustomed to the obedience of a single authority and each of the levies was commanded by their own leader. Even the comparatively lax discipline of the irregulars often proved too irksome for the tribes.

The impact of the British on tribal warfare remains to be assessed. The hill-tribes were not slow in seeing the superiority of firearms over their own weapons. The strength acquired

by the frontier villages, including the Kuki settlements, armed with Government muskets and the long series of military expeditions against them, convinced the Angami Nagas of the necessity of obtaining similar firearms: 'we have given them muskets', Major Butler, the Principal Assistant of Nowgong, remarked in 1851, 'and our annual tours (military expeditions) have taught them the art of war'. Before long the Angamis and other Nagas were determined to acquire firearms. They obtained these by raiding the British outposts, and ambushing dak-runners, escort parties and elephant hunters. Some of them even enrolled themselves into the Frontier Police to learn its use, deserting finally with the arms. The demand for firearms promoted a clandestine arms-traffic on the Assam, Cachar, Manipur and Burma borders. Stringent measures for arms control had to be adopted by the Government before the problem reached dangerous proportions. Nevertheless the acquisition of firearms by the Nagas completely revolutionised their mode of warfare. The siege of Kohima in 1879, described by an eye-witness, clearly shows what the Nagas had achieved:

1. Captain Butler, Political Agent in the Naga Hills and son of the Butler quoted above, wrote in 1875: 'to obtain (firearms) is just now one of the keenest desires they have; in fact, an Angami will give almost anything he was for a gun, and if he cannot get it by fair means, will run any risk to get it by foul'. Rough Notes on the Angami Nagas, J.A.S. 1875, Vol XLIV, No. 4. The change occurred among the other Nagas also. Sir William Hunter wrote in his Statistical Account of Assam, Vol. II, p. 179 in 1879 that 'to possess fire arms is now the most eager desire of a Naga, no matter to what tribe he may belong'.

"On the 16th (October) the enemy began to attack and harassed the garrison greatly. At first their bullets whistled harmlessly overhead, but after a little practice, the Magas found their mistake and kept up a steady fire upon the building and exposed places .... they surrounded it (the stockade) on all sides and kept up a hot fire for the best part of the day. Towards evening the firing became less but there was a constant dropping fire that was most harassing as it prevented the garrison from taking any rest .... The Magas always aim at killing officers first .... the bungalows of the two officers were particular objects of attention and received numberless bullets and lighted sticks"1.

The change in tribal warfare as a result of the acquisition of firearms was not confined to the Magas. The military expedition into the Lushai hills in 1871-72 made it evident that these tribes too had become proficient in its use2. Aided by unscrupulous traders, an illicit arms traffic also developed in these hills. After the annexation of these tribal areas extensive disarmament operations had to be conducted3. These measures along with the increased vigilance on the borders had the effect of arresting the traffic in arms but the problem was not entirely stamped out.

The effectiveness of tribal weapons and warfare in the hills and jungles of the North East Frontier on the other hand was not entirely lost upon the British. The *daog* and later the Khukri became a standard equipment of the Frontier Police, and even military officers leading expeditions against the hill tribes frequently demanded its inclusion among its arms and equipment. *Panjies*, once described as an invention of 'savage warfare', came to be freely used to protect frontier outposts. Scouting and reconnoitring after the manner of the tribes, but in a regulated form, found its way into the drill manuals of the force entrusted with the defence of the frontiers.