CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM IN ITS BEGINNING

In the middle of the eighteenth century the Burmese under Alaungpaya (1752-1760) conquered the Irrawaddy delta and Tenasserim. Under his successor Badawapaya they expanded northwards; Arakan was conquered in 1785, Manipur in 1813, and in 1816, on the invitation by the disaffected Ahom Viceroy at Guwahati, the Burmese armies marched into the valley of the Brahmaputra. By 1822 Assam practically became a Burmese province. The exactions and oppression of the Burmese drove many Assamese including the two princes Chandrakanta Singh and Purandar Singh to seek shelter in British territory. Aided by the British many of these fugitives attempted reprisals which not unnaturally provoked the Burmese to carry on retaliatory raids even into British territories. David Scott, Magistrate of Haingpur, who later laid the foundations of British administration in Assam, therefore impressed upon the Governor-General in Council in early 1822, the importance of adopting some 'permanent measures' for the defence of Eastern frontier.

1. For details see Banerjee, A.O.: The Eastern Frontier of British India, Pp. 207-211.
2. Papers Relating to the First Burmese War Presented to Parliament: Extract of despatch to Court, 12 September, 1823.
Accordingly, in August 1822 the Rangpur Local Corps was formed by amalgamating the Cuttuck Legion and the Sylhet Provincial Battalion. It was organised into ten companies of eighty men each totalling 993 men of all ranks. In March 1823, on the recommendation of the Commander-in-Chief it was converted into a light infantry and redesignated as the 8th or Rangpur Light Infantry. On Scott’s recommendation a small Gunboat flotilla was also raised for the security of the river routes into eastern Bengal. This consisted of four large row-boats, each armed with a 12 pounder carronade and manned by five Columbuses. The flotilla was commanded by a Subaltern. With his base at Jagigopha, he was to act in concert with Lieutenant Davidson commanding at that post. The entire 600 miles of frontier stretching from Rangpur to Tippera, including Dacca and Sylhet, with the Teesta River forming its western limits, was placed under the special command of a Lieutenant Colonel with the allowances of a Brigadier.

These measures were little more than routine arrangements for the security of the frontier. Scott, who had carefully

* Raised by Captain S. Fraser in May 1817 to put down the Khurda Rebellion in Cuttuck. For details see, Ryan, D.O.J.: *Historical Records of the 6th Gurkha Rifles*, Vol. I, Ch. I.
1. F.P.C. 9 August 1822: No. 56; The existing Rangpur Local Corps was redesignated the Dinagepur Local Battalion.
3. F.P.C. 9 August 1822: No. 56.
watched the progress of Burmese arms in Assam, had correctly analysed the problem created by the Burmese occupation of Assam when he wrote,

"(there was) nothing .... to prevent them from sacking Dacca and plundering all the adjoining districts, nor have our troops half the chance of being able to meet or overtake them that we had with the Pindaris .... the superior discipline of our troops would avail us very little in that sort of warfare that may be carried on during half the year in this part of the country in boats"1.

The problem was not confined to the Assam Frontier. Since 1815 the Burmese made repeated attacks upon the elephant hunters and people in the Chittagong frontier2. These aggressions reached their climax in September 1823. On the night of the 24th a thousand Burmese soldiers surprised and drove off a British detachment on Shahpuri, an island off Tek Maaf to which they laid claim, killing three sepoys and wounding four others. This was followed by a threat to invade British territories, from Assam to Chittagong, if an attempt was made to reoccupy the island. Although the Burmese failed to carry out their threat, the realities of the situation could no longer be ignored by the Government of India. On 31 October 1823, the Governor-General in Council informed Lieutenant General Sir Edward Paget, the Commander-in-

1. F.P.O. 20 July 1822: No. 51; Scott to Swinton, 10 July.
Chief, that should it become necessary to strike at the Burmese it would be "a primary object of attention to expel the Burmese from the Countries of which they have recently possessed themselves on our frontier, such as Assam, Manipur, and even Arracan, by encouraging and supporting the Original Inhabitants of these Countries in any attempt which they may be disposed to make to restore the line of their native Princes, and thus securing for ourselves a barrier of friendly states between the British and Burmese Dominions along the whole of our Eastern Frontier."  

TREATIES WITH CACHAR AND JAYANTIA

Meanwhile the situation in Cachar was fast becoming alarming. Cachar, like Assam, occupied a position of great strategic significance. One of the easiest passes from Burma into the Company’s territories was reported to run through Cachar and Manipur. The political situation of this frontier state in 1823 was confusing. Three Manipuri princes, who were earlier evicted from Manipur by the Burmese, then held possession of it after having expelled its ruler Govind Chandra. Having

1. F.S.O. 31 October 1823: No. 17.
failed to obtain British help against the usurpers Govind Chandra turned to the Burmese\textsuperscript{1}. On this ground and on the fact that Caohar was once a vassal of the Ahoms in Assam the Burmese proceeded to reinstate Govind Chandra. The prospect of Caohar in Burmese hands was justly viewed with considerable alarm. The Magistrate of Sylhet wrote: 'the occupation of Caohar by the Burmese would lay this country open to the entrance of a large force from the eastward and to which we could oppose no adequate resistance.'\textsuperscript{2}

To prevent Caohar from falling into the hands of the Burmese negotiations were immediately opened with Govind Chandra. A treaty was finally concluded with him by which Caohar was restored on an annual tribute of Rs. 10,000 per annum\textsuperscript{3}. To strengthen his hands a stand of five hundred arms were despatched\textsuperscript{4}. The extension of British protection to the adjoining state of Jayantia which followed completed the 'general system of defensive arrangements for the frontier'. Measures were also taken to send troops to his assistance. In reporting the conclusion of the treaty with Caohar Scott observed that

\begin{itemize}
\item[2.] F.S.C., 12 December 1823; No. 8.
\item[4.] F.S.C., 17 January 1824: No. 6.
\end{itemize}
"the occupation of the Country will .... tend materially to the easy defence of the frontier, not merely by giving us possession on the passes leading to Munnipore .... but chiefly as depriving them of the advantage they would have derived from the possession of so convenient a retiring place after their passage across the mountains, and compelling them to meet us immediately after a harassing journey through the hills, and risk a battle without further supply of provision than what they may carry with them"1.

SYLHET LOCAL CORPS

Two great obstacles to the military defence of Gaohar were its dreadful climate and difficult terrain. Such a country was extremely unfavourable to the disciplined troops of the Company. Scott feared that the Burmese soldiers, inspite of their defective equipment and military organisation, would prove very destructive to the Company's Regiments. He was from the very beginning reluctant to entangle the troops in the defence of Gaohar and would have preferred to let Gambhär Singh, one of the three fugitive Manipuri princes, to undertake the protection of the principal passes. Nevertheless, with the advance of the Burmese into Gaohar in early 1824 and their subsequent clashes with British troops, the first

of which occurred on 17 January at Bikrampur, measures had to be taken for the defence of the Sylhet frontier. The district was strengthened by the addition of three Companies of Regulars at the Sadar station, three at Badarpur and two at Dum Duma (?). The Raja of Tippera was required, at the peril of his independence, to prevent the movement of any force through his State. For the occupation and defence of Gaohar, Scott proposed on 6 February 1824, to raise immediately a corps of three or four hundred Manipuris. Such a body of men would be particularly required during the rains when the state of the country would make it impracticable for the employment of other troops. There were in Sylhet at the time a considerable number of Manipuris who had fled from their country along with their princes when it was overrun by the Burmese. These Manipuris, Scott reported, were 'a hardy muscular and warlike race imbued with a deadly hatred of the Burmese'. He had no doubts that with proper management they would make excellent soldiers. Scott's proposal was also favoured by Colonel George Macmorine who had assumed command of the Eastern Frontier on 21 January last. These men, the Colonel observed, could be safely employed in duties of fatigue or for any other service where from the nature of the climate

2. Ibid.
it would be impossible to employ Regular sepoys\(^1\). Concurring with this view the Governor-General in Council readily accor-
ded his sanction\(^2\). Orders were accordingly issued to raise a Local Battalion under the name of the 16th or Sylhet
Local Battalion for the duties of the Cachar and Sylhet
frontiers\(^3\). The Headquarters of the corps was fixed at Sylhet.
The services of Captain P. Dudgeon, 1/10 N.I., then in
command of the Nerbudda Sebundies, were requisitioned to organise the new Battalion\(^4\). On Dudgeon's recommendation Lieutenant Ellis of the 23rd M.I. was appointed its Adjutant.

The Sylhet Local Battalion was organised into eight companies. It was principally composed of Manipuris, but had recruits from Sylhet and Cachar and some of the surrounding hill tribes. Owing to the prevailing state of emergency volunteer drafts from seven other local corps were supplied to it\(^5\). The nature of the frontier and the services upon which the Corps was likely to be employed determined, as it did its composition, its arms and equipment. Besides the musket, which formed the basic weapon, the corps had an attachment of

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1. Ibid. MacMorine to Scott, 10 February.
2. M.C. 19 February 1824: No. 2d.
3. O.O.O.O., No. 64, 19 February 1824; P.S.C. 20 February 1824: No. 2d.
4. M.C., 19 February 1824: No. 38.
5. M.C., 19 February 1824: No. 38.
Artillery. The *dao*, which was indispensable for clearing jungles and erecting stockades, was made a part of their equipment. Further, to ensure its maximum mobility no soldier below the rank of a havildar was allowed baggage porters.

POLICY TOWARDS MANIPUR

After the clash at Bikrampur, on 17 January 1824, the force under Major Hewton, returned to Badarpur and the troops from Cachar were also withdrawn. The Burmese then advanced to Jatrapur, about five miles east of the frontier and eight from Badarpur, and their armies from Assam and Manipur effected a junction near that place. They threw a bridge across the river Surma and erected stockades on both sides of it. This was followed by more skirmishes until the English forces met with a reverse, with considerable loss, on 21 February before the stockaded position of Dudpali. The troops under Lieutenant Colonel Bowen fell back on Jatrapur, but the Burmese made no attempt to follow up their success and instead withdrew to Manipur. During these clashes Gambhir Singh and his followers

2. Ibid: Scott to Innes, 1 March.
actively aided the British troops and so impressed was Scott that he at once decided to employ him for the defence of Cachar. On 23 February he proposed to the Government of India to entertain fifty Manipuri horsemen and raise a body of three hundred foot soldiers under the personal command of Gambhir Singh at the monthly expense of Rs. 2200/-². In the absence of cavalry, Scott wrote, it was important to avail the services of the Raja who had proved himself so useful in cutting up fugitives and harassing the retreating enemy. The Governor-General in Council looked upon the proposal as highly expedient and promptly accorded his sanction³. The five hundred stand of arms lately sanctioned for the Cachar Raja was diverted towards Gambhir Singh⁴.

War was formally declared upon the Burmese on 5 March 1824. On 23 March Scott submitted a report on the routes between Cachar and Manipur and from the latter country to the Burmese Empire. The information obtained showed that it was then very doubtful whether the passes between Manipur and Cachar were so few and so easily defended as was earlier

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1. Ibid: No. 17 Scott to Swinton, 20 February.
2. Ibid: No. 20.
3. Ibid: No. 23.
supposed. On the other hand there appeared every reason
to believe that as long as the Burmese had a firm footing
in Manipur they would find the means of opening new passes
in various directions through Caohar and the adjoining state
of Tippera. From Manipur they could direct their attacks
against Caohar and through it against Syhnet and Tippera
on one side and against Assam and Jayantia on the other.
Besides, it could not be expected of Haja Govind Chandra
with his scanty population to provide effective resistance
against the invaders. The mere occupation of Caohar, there­
fore, could not prevent the inroads of the Burmese into
British territories. Whereas the occupation of Manipur,
Scott’s report stated, would not only secure the Eastern­
Frontier but bring British troops within fifteen days’ journey
of the capital of the Burmese Empire. The Governor-General
in Council therefore completely concurred with the Agent when
the latter concluded that

"The establishment of an independent Government in
Munnipore, in alliance with us, would undoubtedly
prove the most powerful and effectual check upon
the Burmese Government that could well be devised
by affording us at all times a ready passage into
the heart of their dominions, and as an ally, a
military power that could upon occasion prove
really useful to us".¹

¹. Ibidi Nos. 5-8.
The shift in policy towards Manipur was marked by encouragement to Gambhir Singh to regain his country. He was assured that during the proper reason for military operations he would receive the support of the Company's troops. In the meantime he was instructed to raise a body of Maniuri pioneers and endeavour to make the roads practicable for elephants and laden bullocks.

OPERATIONS AGAINST BURMESE

The Burmese who retired to Manipur after their successful defence of Dudpatli returned to Caunur just before the rains set in. A series of offensive operations failed to expel them from there, and from July 1824 operations came to a standstill owing to the commencement of the rains. On the Assam frontier the troops collected at Goalpara advanced under Colonel MacMorine upon Gaunati which was occupied on 13 March. On the arrival of Scott in Assam through the Jayanti hills the British forces further advanced towards Kalibor. By May Kalibor was occupied, and a determined bid on the

1. Ibid.
2. For details of the Military operations see Banerjee A.C. Op. Cit. IX.

* These included the Rangpur Light Infantry, 23rd Regiment N.I. Dinagepur Local Battalion, A Wing of the Champaran Light Infantry and a few detachments of Irregular Cavalry.
part of the Burmese to reoccupy it was repulsed. But further advance could not be made on account of the rains. Colonel Alfred Richards, who had in the meanwhile succeeded Colonel MacMorine on the latter's death on 5 May 1825, was compelled to return to Gauhati.

The campaign was resumed in October 1824. By the end of January 1825, Kaliabor, Maramukh and Jornat fell in quick succession. On 30 January Richards laid siege to Rangpur, the former capital of the Ahom Kingdom in Upper Assam. The Burmese, divided among themselves, capitulated the following day. In Cachar, operations were also resumed and by October the Burmese retreated to Manipur. It was then decided to advance a British force to Manipur. To aid the troops Tucker, the Commissioner of Sylhet, suggested that Gambhir Singh's Levy should be raised to five hundred men and a sum of one lakh of rupees should be advanced to him. This was not only approved of but sanction was also given to Scott's proposal that the Levy should be ultimately raised to two thousand infantry and two hundred cavalry with a few guns.

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* The fort was under two chiefs, the Bogle Phukan and Sham Phukan. The former was allowed by Colonel Richards to withdraw to Burma. The Sham Phukan, fearing for his life for having executed the Burmese Governor of Assam, remained back. He and his followers, about seven in number, were settled in Singimari.

1. F.S.C. 26 November 1824; Nos. 11-16; Tucker to Swinton, 30 October.
carried on elephants\textsuperscript{1}. The advance to Manipur proved impracticable, and was finally abandoned. The army was recalled to Dacca and a Brigade was left in Caohar\textsuperscript{2}. The task of penetrating into Manipur was left to Gambhir Singh.

FUTURE POLICY OUTLINED

The operations against the Burmese revealed the economic and political condition of Assam. Its resources were completely destroyed and the country was depopulated. The nobility was faction-ridden and the princes extremely unpopular with the people. The Assamese and the Caoharies displayed an utter lack of a martial spirit throughout the campaign against the Burmese. On 9 November 1824, Scott reported that with the exception of the Manipuris none of the natives or tribes on the North-East Frontier could be relied upon to undertake the defence of their country\textsuperscript{3}. 'The Assamese and the Caoharies are' he remarked

"unfortunately, so timid and effeminate a character, that the defence of those countries, however nece-
assary for the security of our own territories must be provided for in great measure, by extraneous means .... the Nagas, the Singphoys, the Khasis and other tribes to the eastward of Assam .... are perhaps too little advanced in the arts of civilization and of government to be able to make any effectual resistance against the numerous armies of the Burmese".

Under these circumstances they could not be expected to offer any resistance to the Burmese in future. The buffer concept being impracticable, the Government of India turned its attention towards the best means of defending these countries on which depended the security of the Eastern Frontier. The problem was not an easy one, for geographical and climatic conditions had to be taken into account. After a careful examination of the question Sir Edward Paget, the Commander-in-Chief, in his Minute dated 15 December 1824, laid down the policy to be followed in future; the Eastern Frontier must be secured by a system of fortified military posts strategically located on the most vulnerable positions.

To garrison these posts he proposed that a body of Caffres* should be raised. He had seen in Ceylon, the extra-

1. Ibid.
2. F.S.C. 14 January 1825; No. 1; Minute by Paget, 15 December, 1824.
* Probably derived from the Arabic Kafir or non-believer in Islam, the term was applied to the black tribes of South Africa. It was also applied in the Phillipine Islands to the Papuas of New Guinea, and the Alfuras of the Malaccas brought into the slave market. See Yule, H. and Burnell A. O.; Hobson-Jobson, Pp. 141 ff.
ordinary ability of this robust, hardy and valiant race for warfare in jungles where neither Europeans nor natives could survive. In proposing the formation of this corps the Commander-in-Chief had taken into consideration the fact that the Regular Native Regiments of the Bengal army could not be employed on this service. The dreadful mortality among them clearly showed that the men could not withstand the climate. Very often medical officers had to send back the sepoys to their homes as the only means of preserving their lives. The sepoys themselves acquired a distaste for the service as is borne out by the unprecedented desertions from the Regiments ordered to the frontier, as well as by the mutinous disposition of those already there. Nor was the organisation and strength of the Bengal army to be overlooked. Complaints of the inefficiency and inadequacy of the Military Establishment of the Bengal Presidency were not uncommon. Sir Edward in his tour of inspection in June 1823 had found the Native Infantry Regiments in the most distressing condition; they were not only of inadequate strength but also lacking in discipline. This state of affairs he attributed to the

2. Ibid: In October 1825 Captain Horshorougn reported to Colonel Richards that discontent had prevailed in the 46th M.I. It was observed that this was due to their remaining in Assam for too long and a pretended inability to march from sickness. Richards found the men 'reduced in energy and in personal appearance .... mere shadows of their former selves'.
fact that the battalions were for the most part broken into numerous detachments and scattered throughout the country. The Regular Regiments, therefore, could not be employed on a service which would have scattered them into numerous frontier outposts. On the other hand, Paget was not well disposed towards Local Corps like the Sylhet Battalion and the Magh Levy, raised along with the former from the Magh refugees from Arakan. These Corps were chiefly composed of Manipuris and Maghs who, he pointed out, were driven out of their countries by the Burmese themselves and therefore little reliance could be placed on them. The Honourable J. Pendall, Member of Council, took an entirely different view of the problem of the frontier force from that of Sir Edward Paget. He disagreed with the Commander-in-Chief on the military capacity of the Manipuris and Maghs. They were overcome only after a long resistance; infact treachery and not want of personal courage being responsible for their defeat. Pendall even suggested that the tribes between the hill tracts of Assam and Manipur should be embodied into a militia similar to what Augustus Cleveland, the Collector of Bhagalpur, did in 1780 with the predatory tribes surrounding his district. The militia could later be incorporated in the Local Corps for the defence of

1. P.S.C. 14 January 1825: No. 3 Minute by John Pendall, 29 December 1824.
2. Ibid.
the frontier and save the Regulars from a service so injurious to their health and discipline. He was reluctant to adopt Paget's scheme of raising Caffres before a more elaborate report on them was forthcoming. The question of the frontier force was settled by Lord Amherst, the Governor General, in his Minute of 3 January 1825. Amherst not only agreed with Pendall on the expediency of employing Local Corps on the Eastern Frontier but added that he would look only to them for the future defence of the frontier.

On 14 January 1825 when a general augmentation was made to Regular Native Infantry Regiments the strength of the Local Corps was raised to one thousand privates each. Detailed instructions were issued by the Commander-in-Chief to Brigadier-General Shuldham and Colonel Richards, commanding Eastern Frontier and in Assam respectively, to select suitable sites for fortified positions with a view to future arrangements when the defence of the frontier would be entrusted to the Local Corps. To help them officers from the Survey Department were placed at their disposal.

1. Ibid: No. 4.
2. Ibid: No. 5.
4. Ibid.
The question of the military posts in Assam soon became interlinked with a difficult tribal problem. The military occupation of Upper Assam after the fall of Rangpur in early 1825 brought the British in immediate contact with the Moamarias, the Khamtis and the Singphos. During the Burmese invasions the Moamarias under their redoubtable chief, Matibar Barsenapati, maintained a precarious balance between the invaders and the invaded. On the other hand, the Khamtis, and particularly the Singphos, allied themselves with the Burmese and thoroughly ravaged the frontier carrying off thousands of defenceless inhabitants into slavery. This system of rapine and outrage attended with the most revolting cruelties had been carried on to an unprecedented extent during the months following the capitulation of Rangpur. Military operations had therefore to be continued to the extreme easter frontier of Assam. The earliest relations of the British with the Singphos is thus characterised by series of operations on the one hand and a determined resistance on the other. By July 1825 Lieutenant J.C. Neufville

of the 42nd N.I., had succeeded in ridding the frontier
of the remnants of the Burmese and bringing under submission
several of the refractory Singpho chiefs. This was by no
means the end of the problem. Constant reports of the
return of the Burmese in alliance with the disaffected
Singphos kept the frontier in a continued state of alarm.
With a view to checking the Singphos and defending the
frontier against the Burmese, Colonel Richards in October
1825 submitted his scheme of frontier posts on the lines
laid down by the Commander-in-Chief in his Minute of 15
December 18241. He selected Sadiya, Borhat and Jaipur for
the defence of Upper Assam. At Sadiya and Borhat he recommen-
ded that field-works should be thrown up2. As it would be
difficult to keep masonry fortifications in constant repair
these were to be constructed of earth. At Jaipur, twelve
miles in advance of Borhat, a redoubt was proposed3. The
size of these works would depend on the number of men
intended to garrison them. These advanced posts should be
supported from Jorhat and Bienmol. The latter station Rich-
ards recommended should be the military Headquarters of

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
Assam, where he proposed the immediate construction of a permanent cantonment. Both David Scott and the Governor-General in Council attached considerable importance to the proposed posts but its final selection had to await the outcome of the political arrangements with the frontier chiefs.

The territories occupied by the Moamarias, the Khamtis and the Singphos occupied a strategic position, commanding the passes between Upper Assam and the Burmese Empire. It was therefore of great importance to secure the support of these chiefs, or at least their neutrality, in the event of an invasion by the Burmese. The Moamarias and the Khamtis were soon won over by promises of protection. The Singphos on the other hand had to be coerced into submission after which negotiations were opened with them. On 5 May 1826 Scott entered into agreements with sixteen out of the twenty-eight Singpho Chiefs by which they undertook to abstain from inroads upon the plains and agreed not to assist the Burmese in any attempt upon Upper Assam and to provide intelligence of any such attempts.\footnote{For details see Barpujari, H.K.: \textit{Problem of the hill Tribes: North-East Frontier}, P. 37} The Beesa Gaum, or Chief,
'a man of uncommon shrewdness and ability' was made the 'Paramount chief' of the Singphos and the channel of communication between them and the British. He was answered with marks of distinctions, and an allowance was given to him for his services in procuring information of the frontier. Formal agreements were concluded a week later with the Barsenapati and the Jadiya Khowa Johain, the Khamti Chief. The former undertook to supply one hundred and forty fighting men, and the latter forty, to the Government. To keep an eye over them and organise the military resources of the frontier Scott recommended that an European Officer should be stationed at Sadiya.

PROPOSALS FOR DEFENCE

After the agreements with the frontier chiefs Scott submitted his plan for the defence of the Jadiya frontier. He proposed to establish at Sadiya, a militia corps of about six hundred to be drawn from the Moamarias and Khamtis. The nature of the country and the mode of warfare

of enemy required, Scott wrote, a corps composed of men
hardy and laborious in habits and inured to the rigours
of the climate. For efficiency in drill and parade exercises
there was neither scope nor necessity. The enervating effects
of the climate on the capacity of the men of the Regular
Regiments or the Local Corps cantoned for long periods in
military outstations had proved to be disastrous. They soon
became incapable of carrying their own clothing and provi­sions and of constructing the most insignificant defensive
works. Besides there were practical problems in maintaining
numerous outposts garrisoned by them. The experience of the
operations against the Singphos showed that the resources of
the country was, owing to its depopulated state, inadequate
for their support and supplies from behind was equally diffi­
cult from the lack of communications. In the Moamarías and
Khamtis Scott found a race ideal for the duties of the fron­
tier. The latter in particular he noticed were

"a fine muscular, active race of men, possessed
of the superior energy and military habits of the
rest of the natives of the Burmese territories,
and if attached to our interests by liberal treat­
ment they may hereafter prove a very useful descrip­tion of soldiers."

1. F.S.C. 13 June 1825; No. 14; Richards to Shuldnam.
Lieutenant Bedingfield, in charge of the Gunboats and under whose supervision the fortifications at Sadiya were undertaken, quickly saw the advantages of such a militia. If armed and disciplined, there was no reason why it should not become a match for any of the tribes against whom it may be required to act. Bedingfield recommended a corps of about five hundred men with a provision for a portion of them to attend to their cultivation. The men ought to have some knowledge of trench work and of building stockades. The only thing to be guarded against was destroying their habits of hardihood and capacity for roughing it. The militia should be commanded by one of their own chiefs for the introduction of native officers from the regiments may not be acceptable to the men.

Lieutenant Neufville was also not altogether indifferent to the advantages of a frontier militia. He was prepared to select from the followers of the Barrenapati and the Sadiya Khowa Gohain a certain proportion to be organised into militia according to the customs of the country.

A part of the militia should be embodied yearly at Sadiya or at some other place for the purposes of training and inspection, the whole being liable to be summoned during emergency. At the head of the Moamarias Neufville proposed to place one of the most intelligent of the Bar森apatī's sons and similarly over the Khamtis one of the Chief's sons. The Raja of Assam, in case restored, should be called upon to organise a militia for the purpose of police and internal defence. The Raja should hold Borhat with two hundred men, and two posts to the eastward by the Bar森apatī. Neufville was also impressed with the importance of strengthening the Bessa Gaua in order to secure the route through his village and the pass by the river Tengapani. But he did not want the irregulars to form the chief defence of the frontier. For this he proposed a specially constituted and permanent force of five hundred men with Headquarters at Sadiya and at the disposal of the Political Agent. Such a force would suffice to keep in check the whole of Upper Assam against internal disturbance as well as border aggressions. With reference to the inability of the Hindustani and upcountry sepoys to withstand the climate Neufville proposed that the corps should be composed of Gurkhas, Shans and Manipuris. The habitations

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
constitution of these men would enable them to assimilate with those of the country they were required to act against. Further, unlike the men drafted from the country, they would not be subject to the evils resulting from local ties, associations and dependence. The Gurkhas, Neufville wrote, were proverbially brave, active, enured to the climate of hills and jungles and above all, free from those prejudices by which the Hindustanis and others are shackled. He therefore proposed to enlist two hundred of them into the force, principally drafted from the Gurkhas in the Champaran and Dinagepur Local Battalions. To these he would add one hundred and fifty Shans from Singimari or elsewhere under one or two of their influential leaders. To complete the corps he suggested the addition of one hundred and fifty Manipuri horsemen. This party he wrote would be of great help against marauding bands who usually were too quick for the infantry.

Final orders on the subject were not passed until 1628. By August of that year Neufville had organised a body of 400 Moamarias and Khamtis armed and clothed by Government. Each militia man received land worth of ten rupees annually as well as batua during their period of training. The scheme

1. Ibid.
2. M.C. 13 September 1628: Nos. 43-50; Neufville to Barron, 23 August.
of a frontier force of mixed composition on the lines proposed by Neufville, although not implemented, formed the basis of the composition and recruitment of the Local Corps after 1828.

DEFENCE OF MANIPUR

To Gambhir Singh, it may be recalled, was left the task of recovering Manipur. In June 1825 he occupied Manipur and by early 1826 cleared the Kabaw Valley of the last detachments of the Burmese. When in June 1826 the question of withdrawing the subsidy from him for the maintenance of the Levy was taken up, Tucker, the Commissioner of Sylhet reminded the authorities at the Fort William that,

"There can be no doubt but the possession of Mankypore by the Burmese afforded the greatest assistance and advantages in their invasion of Coochber. In their hands it may be called the key of Assam and Coochber forming a most convenient asylum for the assembling of their forces and making preparations at leisure for any enterprise they might contemplate in either direction. It would also furnish supplies for an army for sometime which could not otherwise subsist itself at such a distance from their own resources."

Manipur was too distant to be conveniently garrisoned by British troops. Tucker therefore strongly recommended that aid to Manipur should continue. These arguments did not fail to convince the Government of India. The subsidy and military stores were continued to Gambhir Singh until such a time when he was able to make arrangements for his defence and support. Meanwhile British Officers were employed to examine the eastern and south-eastern boundary of Manipur and select suitable military positions for the defence of the frontier.

ASSAM LIGHT INFANTRY

On 7 March 1828 Lower Assam, as far as Bishnath, was permanently annexed to the British dominion. While the restoration of the Ahom monarchy awaited further investigation, a Political Agency was created for the frontier areas under Captain Neufville. The Command of the Bangpur Light Infantry, which had been in Assam since the out break of hostilities with Burma, was invested in the Political Agent. The Second-in-Command with two companies was posted at Sadiya. To render the Regiment adequate for the suppression of internal commotion and foreign aggression the Government of India agreed to

1. Ibid: No. 59.
Scott's suggestion that one or two Gurkha companies should be added to it. When these arrangements were completed in May 1828, orders were issued withdrawing the last of the Regular Regiments from the North-East Frontier. The Rangpur Light Infantry was permanently attached to Assam and entrusted with all its local duties of watch and ward, its title being changed to the Assam Light Infantry (A.L.I.). The men, who were mostly from Upper Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, did not acquiesce in their transfer to a distant and unhealthy frontier without a murmur. The decision of 1825 to entrust the defence of the frontier to Local Corps was never made known to them. They never perceived, on coming to Assam along with the Regular Regiments, that they would be permanently quartered there. The gradual withdrawal of the Regulars had made them considerably apprehensive of their own future. The unfortunate decision to do away with money rations further increased their discontent. Rather than serve on the new terms, the greater portion of the Corps applied for their discharge. One Officer even reported that the men were in a 'state of ferment'.

The Governor-General in Council

1. F.S.C. 7 March 1828: Nos. 4-8.
rightly presumed that these inconveniences would not have been experienced had the Battalion been composed of local inhabitants. Anxious enquiries were accordingly made of the extent to which Assam and the neighbouring hill tracts could supply recruits and whether these could be trained into efficient soldiers. Neufville, the Commanding Officer of the A.L.I. saw the problem from a similar standpoint. He had all along felt that the duties of Sadiya, Borhat and the smaller outposts could be best performed by the Khamtis and Moamarias and not by the upcountry sepoys then in his Corps. On 5 August 1828 he informed Government of his willingness to recruit Manipuris to the entire strength of the Regiment if necessary. He followed this up by a more elaborate report on the question on 23 August. The Manipuris of whom he had already enlisted a few had turned out to be excellent soldiers, and the Jumwas, men inhabiting the lower hills south of Goalpara, he wrote, could also be made into efficient soldiers. Of the latter alone he could enlist no less than three hundred men. He had also been assured by Scott, he added, of the capacity of the neighbouring hill tribes for the service. Neufville concluded

2. F.S.C. 29 August 1828: No. 3; Neufville to Scott, 5 August.
3. M.C. 13 September 1828: Nos. 4-9; Neufville to Barron, 23 August.
that with such local material and the Gurkhas his Regiment could be made entirely independent of all recruiting from outside the North-East Frontier. Neufville's report, particularly his willingness to recruit Manipuris, quickly caught the attention of the Governor-General in Council. The Agent was at once informed that Government was prepared to authorize an increase, as batta for service in Assam, of one rupee to the men and a proportionate increase to the native officers from among the Manipuris. This monetary increase was expected to be a sufficient inducement to the Manipuris of the Sylhet Light Infantry (S.L.I.) to volunteer to the A.L.I. Already drilled and disciplined they would be a ready force and serve as a nucleus for the further enrollment of their countrymen.

In the following October it was resolved to transfer two complete companies from the S.L.I. to the Assam Local Corps. The transfers were carried out in the following month, after which the other classes of recruits were made supernumeraries to the total strength of the corps.

On Captain Neufville's taking charge of the Political

1. M.C. 13 September 1828: Nos. 4-9; Neufville to Barron, 23 August.
2. F.S.C. 29 August 1828: No. 4.
3. F.S.C. 31 October 1828: No. 3.
4. M.C. 8 November 1828: Nos. 146-47.
Agency the Headquarters of the A.L.I. was fixed at Sibsagar, the Chief Civil station. Since Neufville was engaged in the civil and political duties of the agency and the second-in-Command was detached to Sadiya, an additional European officer was attached to the corps. In October 1823 Neufville outlined the following permanent commands:

- Sadiya ..... 100 under second-in-Command
- Rangpur ..... 50 for detached duties
- Jorhat ..... 150 under one European officer
- Charduar and other duars .. 50
- Lower Assam including ..... 250
- Nowgong, Gauhati and Goalpara
- Aggregate on leave and ..... 150
- furlough
- Headquarters ..... 210

960

Since this distribution left a very small proportion of the men with the colours for any emergency, Neufville subsequently

reduced the Sadiya Command placing instead a Jemadar's party of 50 men at Sissi. The Khanti Militia, fully armed and equipped and under their panoply of scarlet cloth, wrote Neufville, was a match for any of the neighbouring hill tribes.