CHAPTER II
THE IRREGULARS: EARLY PHASE

The hill tribes soon became a source of considerable anxiety to the local authorities. In October 1828 occurred the 'first serious aggression' on the Bhutan frontier. On the 22nd of that month Dumpy Baja, the chief of the Buriguma dqw, one of the several dqw or narrow strips of land adjoining the Bhutan borders, descended upon a frontier village and carried off some individuals who had fled from his jurisdiction including the persons who had given the fugitives shelter. A police officer and several sepoys sent to investigate into it were killed when Dumpy fell upon the party with a force of nearly three hundred men. A detachment of irregulars under a jemadar subsequently released the captives and established at the dqw the first military post. No sooner was this done than came news, in April 1829, that Teerut Singh, the Khasi chief of Bungkholow who had earlier entered into a treaty with the British Government, burned down the sanatorium at that place and massacred a number of

2. Ibid P. 17
3. Of these Bijni, Chapakhamar, Chapaguri, Duma and Charkola lie in the district of Kamrup, and Kailing and Buriguma in Darrang. The Deb and Dharma Bajas of Bhutan were allowed by David Scott to hold these dqw subject to the payment of nominal tribute.
4. Aitchison: Op cit Vol. XII Pp. 122-23. Under this agreement, made on 30 November 1826, Teerut Singh accepted the protection of the British Government and agreed to provide a military road through his territory and when necessary the aid of his troops as far as Kaliabor. See also Barpujari, H.K.: Problem of the Hill Tribes, etc. P. 41
men, including two British officers, Captain Bedingfield and Lieutenant Burlton. The incident marked the beginning of a formidable uprising against the British which continued for several years. Operations immediately commenced against the Khasis. Captain Lister, the Commanding Officer of the S.L.I., marched against the insurgents from Sylhet with a small detachment from his corps. Lister, writes Pemberton, 'drove these Cossayahs from post to post, stormed their entrenchments, penetrated their caves and fortresses, and by the rapidity of his movements, and by the boldness of his assaults (so) completely destroyed the confidence in their own prowess'. They henceforth confined themselves to attacking small parties by ambush and rarely ventured to face openly any detachments however inferior to them in numbers. To overwhelm the chiefs and keep them under restraint stockaded military posts in the hills were established. At the same time to ensure the line of communications between the posts and Assam as well as to prevent raids upon the plains the tracts bordering on Assam had to be occupied.

SHAN IRREGULARS

The absence of roads and the destruction of the few

2. F.S.C. 14 August 1829: No. 11
existing ones by the Khasis caused immense difficulties in keeping the detachments of the Local Corps in the hills supplied with provisions. The transport of the more bulky articles of consumption were either impracticable or practicable only at a great cost and delay. The men of the Local Corps were extremely averse to carrying their own provisions, and the employment of feeble minded porters who invariably took to flight on the first shower of arrows helped only to aggravate the difficulties. Further, the climate of the hills and the duare proved inhospitable to the health of the sepoys. For this reason alone efforts were made from the very beginning to employ irregulars of the country for the ordinary duties of the frontier. For the Garo frontier of Goalpara, notorious for its deadly climate, there was a small Sebundy* Corps, drawn mostly from the Jurwas or men inhabiting the lower hills, whose origin could be traced back to 1795. To the unhealthiness of the duare can also be traced the genesis of the Shan irregulars. On the capitulation of Rangpur in January 1825, it may be recalled, the Bogle Phukan with the greater part of the Burmese army retired to Burma through the Singpho route while the Sham Phukan with his followers


* The origin of the term sebundy is obscure. It was applied to the irregular foot soldiers or militia that accompanied the tax collectors during Mughal times. Sarkar, J.N.: Military History of India, P. 148; See also Colonel Huxford: History of the 8th Gurkha Rifles, P. 10.
decided to remain in Assam. David Scott, who had already acquired considerable experience of the Garo and Bhutan frontiers\(^1\), quickly saw that considerable use could be made of these Burmese in the capacity of militia against the bordering hill tribes\(^2\). On his recommendation these Burmese or Shans\(^3\), about seven hundred in number, were settled in Singimari in the estate of Aurangabad\(^4\). An area comprising of ten thousand bighas were leased to them on military tenure for a period of eight years. They were exempted from paying rent for the land during the period of lease on condition that one-fourth of them would act as soldiers against the Garos or any other tribes within the North-East parts of Rangpur. For this duty they were paid one anna per man per day; when they were employed outside their jurisdiction they received a pay of six rupees per month\(^4\). These irregulars were employed against the Khasis from the beginning of the campaign. In June 1829 when troops had to move out immediately towards Mariau, where Teerut Singh was reported to have taken refuge, Lieutenant Hamilton Vetoh of the S.I.I. took with him a party of no less than 120 Shans. Again, in the following month when it became necessary to occupy Ramray for the protec-

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1. See Barooah, H.K.: Op Cit Ch. II
2. F.S.C. 5 April 1825: No. 15
3. The early British officers variously referred to the Burmese as Mauns, Shans or Shams. The Shans were originally inhabitants of the Shan or Hill states of the southern highlands of Yunnan who descended upon Upper Burma during the 13th century A.D. These invaders were said to have been referred to by the Burmese as 'Shans' from a similar Chinese word probably meaning highlander. In course of time they became assimilated with the Burmese. For details see Gogoi, P: *The Tai and the Tai Kingdom*, Pp. 8-II
4. Ibid
stion of the lowlands Scott readily accepted Haju Gamber Singh's offer of sixty volunteers from his Manipuri Levy. He justified the measure on grounds of necessity explaining that the duty could only be performed by a body of troops prepared for every privation and willing to avail themselves of the meagre resources of the hills for their support instead of depending entirely upon the Authorities for everything. The cost of the party was in any case less than what would have been expended in providing for a detachment of equal strength from the Local Corps.

Towards early 1830 it became all the more necessary to employ such irregulars in place of the local corps. While the situation on the Bhutan frontier continued to be disquieting, there appeared on the extreme eastern frontier a considerable body of Singphos from Hukwang under one Wookum Khoomyan bent upon, it was reported, invading British territory. The situation was a serious one, for the invaders had concerted plans with the disaffected nobility of Upper Assam who had already caused some anxiety by their rebellious activities since the past year.

Wookum and his followers, however, were soon dispersed by the prompt advance of Neufville to Lattoora towards the close of

1. P.S.C. 14 August 1829: No. II
2. Barpujari, H.K.: Assam: In the days of the Company, p. 49-51
February 1830. But some four hundred rebels did assault the military post of Hangpur and would probably have carried it had it been of a lesser strength. These incidents clearly showed that Upper Assam still required a large portion of the S.I. for its protection and it was not possible to detach large numbers from it for service either in the Khasi hills or in the Bhutan duars.1 Meanwhile, the irregulars, particularly the Shans, had shown a remarkable aptitude for service in the Khasi Hills. Yetoh considered them better suited than any other class of troops for maintaining the military posts between Assam and Hungenchow and for the 'desultory and harassing warfare' in so difficult and unhealthy country.2 Therefore, towards the close of the year when it became necessary to reduce the Ramray state to subjection, in consequence of a murderous raid made by one of its chiefs upon the duars of Pantan, Bogy and Bongaon, David Scott promptly pressed 120 more Shans for service.3 In addition, another party of 150 were kept in reserve. By early 1831, Brigadier Brodie, of the S.I., with these Shans and a party of armed Khasis penetrated into Ramray and brought to book several of the refractory chiefs. Brodie's operations were significant for they illustrated the importance of employing irregulars in the hills of Assam in preference disciplined troops. They 'clearly indicated', wrote Scott, 'the means we should in future adopt in the

1. F.S.O. 12 March 1830: Nos. 1-4
2. Ibid: Yetoh to Scott, 23 January 1830
3. F.S.C. 11 February 1831: Nos. 27 and 32
petty warfare that may be expected occasionally to take place with the rude tribes. Brodie had accomplished his task in three weeks after Captain Haslam with more than four companies of Regulars failed even to come into contact with the enemy in the course of two whole months. Scott therefore concluded that

"the successful result of this small expedition becomes of no trifling consequence, when it is considered that we have on this frontier a boundary line of about one thousand and five hundred miles in extent, the whole of which is subjected to similar depredations to those that led to the late military operations in Assam, while owing to the unhealthiness of the climate and other local circumstances it may fairly be considered indefensible by means of our regular troops."

He proposed to the Government of India that these Shans, or 'Sham Musketeers' as he designated them in his despatches, should be organised into a militia and placed permanently under the superintendence of an European officer. Under such supervision and proper organisation the militia need only be of 130 men. The Vice-President in Council having concurred in this proposal the Shans were placed under Brodie who was given an allowance of Rs. 100/- for the charge. When Brodie fell a victim to the climate towards the final stages of the operations

1. F.S.C. 20 May 1831; Nos. 35-36; Scott to Swinton, 29 April.
2. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
the charge devolved upon Vetch. Although well adapted for operations against the Garos, Khasis and the Shuitas it was not considered safe to employ the Shans on the Sadiya frontier which was then frequently threatened by the Burmese.

PROPOSALS TO AUGMENT SYLHET CORPS

The organisation of the Shan irregulars somewhat relieved the pressure on the A.L.I. In May 1831 Scott was even able to recommend a reduction in its numerical strength bringing it down to 8 companies of 80 men each. But the duties of the Khasi hills continued to fall heavily upon the S.L.I. Since the transfer of the two companies to the Assam Corps in 1828, the organisation of the battalion remained at 3 companies of 50 men each. As this strength was the peacetime establishment of the battalion it proved wholly inadequate following the Khasi insurrection. The disposition return for November 1831 reveals that no less than 367 men were detailed for outpost duties. The greater portion of these, some 178 men with a proportion of native officers, were distributed between seven posts in the Khasi hills. Of the rest of the battalion 123 were recruits at drill; and there were only 20 men disposable at headquarters. In May 1832 when Charrapunjee had to be reinforced, this small number under a havildar was what Lister could spare. It was certain that if a

1. F.S.O. 18 March 1831: No. 41.
2. F.P.C. 11 June 1832: No. 90; Watson to Jackson, 19 May.
further reinforcement was required other troops would have
to be despatched. In the following month the calls upon the
corps became even heavier. On the 19th, T.C. Robertson, Agent
to the Governor-General, North East Frontier, outlined his plans
to close up the markets and occupy all the principal villages
in the hills in order to force the remaining Khasi Chiefs to
submit. Apart from the whole of the Garroo Sebundies and the
Shans a considerable portion of the S.L.I. was required. Added
to all these was the possibility of sending large detachments
for the military occupation of Cachar. The agent, therefore,
drew the attention of the Government of India towards restoring
the two companies to the S.L.I. Meanwhile, the authorities
at Fort William not only took up the question of adding to the
strength of the Corps but also of the best mode of making the
increase.

The plan of the Chief Secretary at the Fort William,
George Swinton, was to increase the strength of the corps by
adding to it the irregulars. In an elaborate note, dated 6 June
1832, Swinton drew the attention of the Government to the possi-
bility of adding to the S.L.I. one or two companies of the
irregulars. The late David Scott himself wrote, Swinton reminded,
"Native troops unsupported by artillery are exceedingly ill adapted to offensive operations against any of these Eastern tribes who invariably fight behind entrenchments .... if despirited by sickness and want of supplies and absence of artillery, the Local Corps were led against a strong stockade garrisoned by perhaps ten times their number of an indisciplined but nevertheless cool and determined enemy. I apprehend that there would be a very strong probability of their being repulsed with severe loss and no small risk of their falling into that state of forlorn disorder to which the sepoys are in adversity so subject"."1.

Swinton, impressed by the favourable reports* on the Shans, as well as by the obvious advantages of employing them against the Khasis, Garos and Bhutias, proposed that some of these Shans should be enlisted into the S.L.I., and one or two special Shan companies should be attached to the corps under the command of a subaltern officer 2. If this experiment succeeded Swinton hoped that it might be extended to the other hill tribes. In due course it may, perhaps, not be impossible to raise one or two thousand active and hardy Shans, Khasis, Manipuris, Maghs and Gurkhas for jungle service not only in Bengal, but also for overseas service such as at Malacca where their presence would be invaluable.

Also, if the regular regiments in the Lower Provinces had each

1. Ibid. Despatch from Scott, 3 March 1831.
* Captain Francis Jenkins then on a military survey of the North East Frontier also reported that the Shans, though indifferently equipped and clothed were a valuable class of men for military service in the climate of Assam. "They were", he wrote, 'intelligent, brave and exceedingly hardy and healthy - all manner of food nearly alike to them - no small consideration in jungle excursions .... very tractable though I believe as yet very little attention has been paid to training them in anyway'. F.P.C. 25 June 1832: No. 63.

2. F.P.C. 11 June 1832: No. 91, Note by Swinton, 6 June.
a company composed of such men under an officer who understood their language, these companies could be brought together and formed into a corps for hill and jungle service whenever necessary. In the same way, Swinton added, a company or two of the hill tribes could also be attached to the Kamgarh Battalion.

The Vice-President in Council was favourably inclined towards Swinton’s proposals. He also recommended that the Shans might be engaged for service with the S.L.I. either as a component part of the additional companies or formed into a body of irregulars under the special command of a subaltern officer acting under Lister’s orders. But Lord William Bentinck, the Governor-General, saw practical difficulties in the way of mixing irregulars with the men of the Sylhet corps. Besides, there was no guarantee that the Shans, who had their families in Burma, would not turn against the Government in the event of hostilities with that State. As regards raising the strength of the corps Bentinck readily agreed that two companies with due proportion of commissioned and non-commissioned officers should be added. If a further increase was required in future to meet increasing demands, this was to be done by an addition to the numerical strength of each company.

1. P.P.O. 11 June 1832: No. 63.
2. F.P.C. 23 July 1832: No. 9; Minute by Bentinck, 6 July.
RECRUITMENT POLICY CHANGED

The Governor-General also expressed his wish to see the additional companies composed exclusively of Gurkhas as far as practicable. Regarding the mode of recruiting them hints could be taken from the manner in which Neufville formed the Gurkha companies in the A.L.I. The commissioned and non-commissioned officers could be provided by transfers from the Sirmoor and Mussari Gurkha battalions. The men could be available from the disbanded Kumaon Gurkha corps as well as from volunteers from the Sirmoor and Mussari battalions. The Governor-General's suggestions were immediately acted upon, and orders were passed for raising two additional companies composed exclusively of Gurkhas. In addition a few extra subaltern officers were temporarily attached in the corps on the recommendation of the Vice-President in Council and the Agent to the Governor-General to take charge of the numerous detached parties in the hills.

The enlistment of Gurkhas was a departure from the recruiting policy adopted in 1824, when the battalion was raised, that it should be composed principally of the Manipuris. The change in fact began towards the middle of 1830 when complications arose with Gambhir Singh following the murder of Raja Sovina Chandra of Cachar. The Manipuri men under the late Raja were

1. F.P.C. 23 July 1832: No. 10
reported to have acted treacherously, and the local officers expressed some doubts on the loyalty of the Manipuris of the S.L.I. in the event of confrontation with Gambhir Singh. Even Captain Lister, the Commanding Officer, who had practically ruled out the defection of these men, suggested that it might be prudent to replace by Gurkhas, 150 Manipuris, thus reducing their numbers to 200¹. David Scott had thought well of the proposal²; and Government, after a thorough examination of the question, allowed the gradual introduction of Gurkhas into the Corps³. In the A.L.I. the class composition returns show that Gurkhas, Hindustains and Jurbas formed the bulk of the corps.

The Manipuri element had dwindled to a mere 96 men in a battalion of 960. The report of Captain F. Jenkins and Lieutenant R.B. Pemberton on Caonar, dated August 1832, brought further discredit to the Manipuris. The officers, who were sent to collect political and military information of the North-East Frontier towards late 1831, were particularly instructed to notice the military establishment required for the defence of the frontier. Their enquiries revealed that since the death of Captain F. Dudgeon, the first Commanding Officer of the S.L.I., who held a very high opinion of their capabilities, the Manipuri element had been reduced by discharges and the enlistment of

1. P.P.C. 18 June 1830: No. 56
2. P.P.C. 25 June 1830: No. 43
3. M.C. 14 October 1830: No. 33
only choice individuals for subsequent commanding officers never placed great reliance upon them. After ascertaining the opinions of several officers, both civil and military, who were well-placed to view the question with some accuracy, Jenkins and Pemberton came to the conclusion that although individuals of superior military qualities might be picked out from amongst the Munnipoories, that generally speaking they would prove indifferent soldiers under our strict routine of drill and discipline to which they have a great aversion; for the description of guerilla warfare they are constantly exposed in their own country they are admirably adapted and inferior to no troops .... the finest classes of men infinitely prefer the military service of their own Prince with its comparatively lax discipline to ours and the knowledge that they were distrusted by their immediate superior has tended to deteriorate the standard not only of the classes of who would have entered into our service but to would the spirit of those who are already in it.

The two officers advised against their recruitment in large numbers in either the Sylhet or Assam Local corps even if their commanding officers were more satisfied with their military capacity. So long as Hindustanis and Gurkhas were available there was to be no question of resorting to Manipuris in a large scale. The Manipuris were peculiarly devoted to agriculture and were eminently suited for the role of pioneers. It was to these pursuits, the report said, the efforts of the Manipuris should be directed.

1. F.P.O. 27 August 1832: No. 37
2. Ibid
3. Ibid
GAUHATI SEBUNDIES

With the S.L.I. restored to its original strength of ten companies the presence of the two companies of Regulars at Gauhati became unnecessary. Sickness had already made them ineffective. Robertson, the Agent, reported on 25 July 1832 that he would be prepared to dispense with them provided he was allowed to raise in their place two companies of Sebundies. Modelled on the Goalpara or Garrow Sebundies, this new body would be composed entirely of Jurwas or men of the Goalpara district bordering on the Garo hills. By this arrangement, the Agent hoped, there would be at the immediate disposal of the local authorities an efficient body of men capable of withstanding the climate to repel any disturbance in the district. Robertson's proposal could not but meet with the approval of Government, for as early as February 1831 the Vice-President in Council himself had suggested to Scott a similar arrangement.

Robertson was accordingly authorised, on 6 August 1832, to disperse with the Regulars at Gauhati and raise in their place two new companies of Sebundies. Like the Goalpara Sebundies these were placed under the orders of the district magistrate.

1. F.P.O. 6 August 1832: No. 60
2. F.P.O. 25 February 1831: No. 41
REPORT OF JENKINS AND PEMBERTON

In October 1832 Jenkins and Pemberton submitted their report on Assam. Of the other reports* the most important was that on Manipur. Since the close of the Burmese war Manipur was regarded, on the basis of Scott's 'highly coloured description' of the country and its people, as a buffer against the Burmese. The enquiries of these officers clearly showed that after an uninterrupted peace of seven years the country was still totally incompetent to defend itself against a Burmese invasion. The 3000 strong Levy was shown to be very imperfectly disciplined and very little under the control of the officers specially appointed for the purpose of ensuring its efficiency. At best Manipur was to be considered as an advanced military post. The points connected with the defence of Assam were, first, the different military positions and the nature of their duties and, second, the character and distribution of the force. The nature of the defensive arrangements in Lower Assam were mainly to guard against the predatory incursions of the different hill tribes than the

* Their report on the North-East Frontier contained four parts: Cachar, Manipur, Assam and Khasi Hills. With slight modifications these were published by Pemberton in 1835 as Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India


3. Pemberton, Op.cit.; Pp. 168-69. The Agent to the Governor-General T.C. Robertson, dissented from this conclusion and recorded his 'full acquiescence in the opinion entertained by Mr. Scott of the importance of this little state to the tranquility of our dominions..... It is interposed between us and the
hostile invasion of a powerful force from the East; it was only in Upper Assam that an enemy of some consequence was ever likely to be met. The defence of the province mainly rested on the twelve companies of the A.L.I. distributed between:

- Gauhati ..... 3 companies
- Sadiya ..... 2 companies
- Headquarters ..... 6 companies
- Posts adjacent to Headquarters ... 1 company

The report found this arrangement open to many objections. From the lack of proper communications the relief of detachments at a great distance from headquarters was inconvenient and expensive. The Commandant and Adjutant being always required in Upper Assam, the detachments in Lower Assam went without proper supervision. The corps with an organisation of 12 companies was too bulky and not properly distributed. The vulnerability of the South-East Frontier and the doubtful fidelity of the frontier officials demanded a larger garrison for Upper Assam than was allotted to it.

Burmeses and while steady in its attachment to the British Government must even be able to keep it acquainted with the schemes and machinisation of the common foe, in whose hands the province would prove a screen behind which preparations for our molestation might have been carried on with that secrecy and mystery in which the Burmeses rely and which we formerly found in every quarter so difficult to penetrate, P.P.C. 19 December 1833; No. 93.
1. P.P.C. 19 October 1832; No. 114.
Bishnath, which was suitably situated for the defence of the northern duar was left with less than half a company. The report suggested a redistribution of the A.L.I. by reorganising the irregulars in Lower Assam. Under the proposed plan the A.L.I. would be reduced by two companies and its duties in Lower Assam would be performed by the reorganised irregulars. By this there would also be an extra company at headquarters disposable for emergencies.

RE-ORGANISATION OF IRREGULARS

The total number of irregulars employed exclusively in Lower Assam was no less than 415*. These included:

- 150 Shams, distributed between 12 posts in the Khasi hills.
- 200 Goalpara Sepundies, employed on the Garo and Bhutan frontiers.
- 65 Kachari sepoy employed on the Buriguma duar.

Apart from these there were at Gaubati, 200 pykes forming a distinct militia which were employed as jail and treasury guards. These irregulars functioned not as a coordinated or single unit but in small isolated parties. Commanded by civil officers, normally magistrates, very little attention was paid to their

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* Excluding the Gaunati Sepundies which were not completed yet.
training or equipment. Jenkins and Pemberton pointed out that these irregulars in their then neglected and disorganised state were the most expensive troops Government could keep on foot. The rates of pay received by the Shans and Sebundies were five rupees per month per man with an additional two rupees as anna when employed in the Khais hills and in the quara outside their jurisdiction. The sepoys of the A.L.I. received five rupees eight annas and an extra anna of one rupee making a total of six rupees eight annas, or eight annas less than the irregulars who were far inferior to them in pluck and discipline. They inspired so little respect that four times their number were required for any particular duty. Want of training and discipline prevented them from cooperating with the local Corps in any important operation; and this deprived the commanding officers of the local Corps of their service from ignorance of what dependence could placed on their courage and adherence. The officers accordingly recommended that all these irregulars should be embodied into one corps and placed under military command, training them under competent and responsible officers in one uniform system of exercise. The remodelled corps could be organised by transferring two companies from the A.L.I. composed of Jurwas and other Assamese which were to be stationed permanently at Bishnath or Gauhati. Into these the Goalpara Sebundies, the Shans, the

1. F.P.O. 15 October 1832: No. 114 A.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
Kaohari sepoys and Assam militia would be added. These would be armed and equipped in exactly the same manner as the light infantry. The organisation and composition would be thus:

- Two companies transferred from A.L.I. (160)
- ... of Shans (160)
- ... of Goalpara Sebundies (160)
- ... drafted from Kaoharies and Kaohari sepoys and Assam militia would be added, be armed and equipped in exactly the same manner as the light infantry. The organisation and composition would be thus:

Two companies transferred from A.L.I. : 160

,, ,, of Shans : 160
,, ,, of Goalpara Sebundies : 160
,, ,, drafted from Kaoharies & from militia : 160

Total : 640 Privates

In addition there should be the usual complement of European officers and native commissioned and non-commissioned officers.

In the event of hostilities in Upper Assam four or five companies so disciplined and inured to the insalubrious climate of the North-East Frontier could prove a most valuable reinforcement to the troops at Jorhat and Sadiya. In a separate memorandum dated 19 November, Pemberton suggested the following distribution: the headquarters with six companies should be placed at Gaunati, on which would devolve all the duties of Lower Assam and Khasi hills as far south as the river Bogapani; the remaining two companies should be at Goalpara under the second-in-Command for the duties of the Garo frontier.
PROPOSAL NEGATIVED

T.C. Robertson, the Agent to the Governor-General, objected to the proposals on the ground that it would be inadvisable to meddle with a system which did so well as it was. The Goalpara Sebundies, in particular, composed entirely of Jurwas with a few Gurkhas amongst them and with one or two Hindustanis as senior native officers were remarkably well-suited for the service for which these were wanted. No other class of men, excepting the Shans, could stand the climate to which they were so often exposed. They had no caste prejudices and could eat whatever they got; required no commissariat and were always ready to move at half an hour's notice. He further argued that if these men were disciplined sepoys it was unlikely that they would have been exposed to such trying services as on the Garo frontier and in the Khasi duars. By putting them under military authority, Robertson warned, these advantages would be entirely lost. The men would acquire ideas of self importance and comfort which would divest them of that readiness for any duty, at all times and seasons, which then constituted their great merit. The proposed arrangement would besides necessarily require a commandant which would be inconvenient when all the Assistants of the

1. F.P.C. 30 May 1833: No. 93.
2. Ibid.
Agency were military men. The authorities at the Fort William attached considerable weight to these objections against putting the irregulars under regular military authority. The joint proposal was accordingly negatived. The irregulars continued as disjointed bodies.

In October 1833 the Shans were reduced to 50 on a monthly cost of Rs. 439/-. Thirty of them were placed in Nungkhlow and rest in the Khasi duars. The 200 Assamese militia at Gauhati were abolished and barkandases substituted for the protection of the gangs of convicts. A proportion of the Kachari sepoys were enlisted to complete the two companies of Sebundies at Gauhati. Drilled and trained on the model of a light infantry, and costing no more than Rs. 1020/-, the Gauhati Sebundies were entrusted with the duties of the duars in the Khasi hills and of Buriguma and Chatgreek duars in the Darrang district. In addition, it provided the civil and jail guards at Gauhati. The Goalpara Sebundies costing Rs. 1152/- per month remained unchanged.

1. F.P.C. 16 January 1834; No. 2; P.L.T.C., No. 20 of 1834.
2. F.P.C. 19 December 1833; No. 85.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
INSUFFICIENCY OF EUROPEAN OFFICERS

The restoration of Upper Assam to Raja Purandar Singh resulted in certain changes in military locations. The headquarters of the Political Agency was removed to Bishnath; the tract between the Buridihing and Dihong rivers was placed under the officer stationed at Sadiya. In view of these administrative changes the Assam Local Corps was redistributed, viz.,

- Bishnath (Hq) ... 4 companies
- Sadiya ... 2 companies
- Jorhat with Purandar Singh ... 1 company
- Gauhati ... 1 company
- Goalpara ... 1 company
- Detached commands in Upper and Central Assam ... 1 company
- On leave and furlough ... 1 company

The Agent to Governor-General, T.C. Robertson, pointed out in February 1833 that with reference to the wide tract of country to be protected and the consequent division of the battalion into numerous commands the number of European officers attached to the corps should never be less than the commandant, a second-in-command, an adjutant, three subalterns and one or two artillery
officers. Again, in October 1833 Robertson once more brought to the notice of the Government the question of keeping the Local Corps fully officered. There was no officer to take charge of the duties at Sadiya. From the unsatisfactory state of relations with Bhutan it was not improbable that the Commandant himself would have to proceed to the frontier or depute his adjutant, both of which measures were inconvenient.

A lieutenant was soon attached to the corps, but the number of officers continued to be disproportionate to the strength of the regiment and the extent of territory it was called upon to protect. There was with the corps only the Commanding Officer, the Second-in-command, an Adjutant and a Lieutenant. The Commandant, who was also the Political Agent of Upper Assam, was always required on the frontier away from his headquarters, which made it inadvisable to detach his Second-in-command; the Adjutant was required at headquarters for regimental staff duties. If the Lieutenant was posted to Sadiya, as was then proposed, there was no disposable European officer for emergencies or to command the troops in Gauhati or in Lower Assam generally. This state of affairs in Lower Assam was brought to the notice of Francis Jenkins, the newly appointed Agent in succession to

1. F.P.C. 30 May 1833: No. 86; Robertson to Swinton, 7 February.
2. F.P.C. 19 December 1833: No. 85; Robertson to Swinton, 9 October.
Robertston, by Bogle, the Magistrate of Gaunati in April 1834. He had considered it undesirable to employ civil officers in a purely military capacity, even if the nature of their duties or the time at their disposal could admit of such a procedure. Bogle therefore suggested the immediate posting of an European officer at Gaunati. Otherwise, if it became necessary to send out detachments against the hill tribes, as in the case of the Dussani Garos, it would be necessary to resort to the undesirable expedient of entrusting such expeditions to junior native officers.

JENKINS RENEWS EARLIER PROPOSAL

Jenkins fully concurred with the view expressed by the Magistrate at Gaunati on the importance of stationing an officer of the A.L.I. at Gaunati and the impolicy of detaching considerable bodies of troops without an European officer at their head. He strongly urged the Government to attach two or more additional officers to the A.L.I. Jenkins at the same time pointed out that the desired objects could be achieved by reorganising and

1. M.C. 13 April 1834: Nos. 151-152; Bogle to Jenkins, 7 April.
2. Ibid: Jenkins to Macsween, 29 May.
remodelling the two Sebundy Corps somewhat on the lines of his joint proposal with Pemberton in October 1832. The two companies at Goalpara and the two at Gauhati were commanded by their respective magistrates and each formed a distinct corps permanently fixed at each station. The arrangement was not without its defects. It did not allow the men to be commanded by European officers when on actual service, and provided them no reliefs from station to station. Although the men of the two corps showed remarkable aptitude for the service their efficiency was greatly hampered from the want of officers to lead them. Jenkins further pointed that the earlier plan was as economical as it was efficient; for with the S.I. on the one hand and the A.L.I. and the proposed corps on the other, there would be no necessity for calling for the aid of the Regulars against the Khapis or Garos or to put down internal commotions on the whole range of the frontier. Should Government not be prepared to adopt the plan or place the irregular companies under military authority, Jenkins suggested that all the Sebundy companies should be embodied into one corps and placed under the command of a subaltern or a captain together with a local lieutenant or adjutant. The increased efficiency of the remodelled corps would amply compensate the additional outlay. If an officer from the Local Corps was placed at Gauhati the officers of the Sebundy Corps would be stationed at Goalpara.

1. Ibid.
Lord William Bentinok, the Governor-General, recorded a Minute on 1 February 1835 wherein he not only concurred with the Agent but drew certain guidelines for the reorganisation of the sebundies. However, he was unwilling to go to the extent of placing the new corps on the same footing with the A.L.I. in respect of pay and equipment. He suggested that the proposed corps should be remodelled in such a way as to permit them to retain their character of Sebundies. It was inexpedient, if not objectionable, to embody a part of the A.L.I. with the Sebundies. For the light infantry men could not be reduced to the same scale of pay as that of the Sebundies, nor could the latter be raised to the level of the former. If two scales of pay existed in the same corps it would inevitably lead to inconvenient results. Bentinok therefore preferred to reduce the A.L.I. by two companies, permitting the men to volunteer for the Sebundy corps or be absorbed in it. He suggested that at least 105 men with some native officers should be obtained by volunteer drafts from the A.L.I. The new corps should be organised into 8 companies of 80 men each with due proportion of native commissioned and non-commissioned officers. The corps should be commanded by a captain or an old subaltern officer assisted by an adjutant. The establishment of a sergeant-major or a quarter-master sergeant was to be dispensed with. It would only be necessary, the Governor-General wrote, to have a smart drill havildar and a drill naik. The expense of the additional native commissioned

1. F.P.O. 19 February 1835; Nos. 1-5; Bentinok's Minute, 1 February.
2. Ibid.
and non-commissioned officers and men was to be met by the reduction of the two companies of the A.L.I. The actual cost incurred in the reorganisation of the sebundies would, therefore, only be the command allowance of Rs. 200/- per mensem to the commanding officer and Rs. 120/- to the adjutant, amounting to Rs. 3840/- per annum.

The headquarters and six companies of the proposed corps Bentick suggested should be fixed at Gauhati upon which would devolved all the duties of the Khasi hills as far south as the river Bogapani. One company from these would relieve a company of the S.L.I. at Myrung and Nungkhlow. As many as three companies would be required to furnish detachments for all the posts in the plains, from the extreme limit of the Gauhati district to Goalpara. There would still remain two companies at headquarters, which the Governor-General proposed to station at Goalpara. Under this arrangement the A.L.I. would redistributed thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Companies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sadiya</td>
<td>.... 2 companies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorhat</td>
<td>.... 1 company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raha &amp; Howgong</td>
<td>.... 1 company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanduar</td>
<td>.... 1/4 company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishnath (Hq.)</td>
<td>.... 53/4 companies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
As the proposed corps was an amalgam of various classes and tribes it was a question of considerable importance whether they should be retained in distinct companies or generally intermixed. Lord William Bentinck in his Minute, above alluded, wrote 'There can be no doubt that it will be desirable, if possible, to prevent anything like a separation of interests between the different classes of men ...... nothing is more likely to produce such a result than framing the companies of distinct classes'.

Jenkins and Pemberton, whose opinions upon the question were invited, both agreed that all the classes should be blended together and not kept in separate companies. Pemberton further pointed out that in mixed companies the presence of the Hindustani and Gurkha drafts from the Local Corps would produce the best effects on their less thoroughly 'trained comrades and possibly excite in them a desire to achieve the same degree of excellence'. He therefore strongly recommended that a certain proportion, not less than one-third, should be drafted into every company and the remaining two-thirds be completed in equal proportions from the other classes of irregulars. By amalgamating the different classes of men in this manner there would be every chance of finding in every detachment some individual capable of conversing with the local people, an advantage of vital importance on active operations. If on the

1. Ibid.
2. F.P.O. 6 April 1835: No. 107.
other hand, the irregulars, whose duties had hitherto never brought them in contact with each other, continued in separate companies a 'Community of feeling and interests' would be absent. Discontent would also follow, Pemberton said, over the question of promotion. Jenkins dwelt mainly on future recruitment. Henceforth recruitment should be confined to the tribes of Lower Assam, principally the Rabhas. These he pointed out were the best classes of men for service in the unhealthy jungles of the Bhutan and Garo frontiers where the corps was chiefly to be employed. The Shans, equal to the Rabhas in every respect, had become old, disliked submission to regular military discipline and their colony at Singimari was worn out. The Kacharis were wild, dull and less tractable and could not be recruited in large numbers.

The recommendations of these officers formed the basis not only of the composition at the time of its reorganisation but also of its future recruitment policy. The bulk of the corps was drawn from the Rabhas and Jurwas and a proportion of one-fourth was fixed for Hindustanis and Gurkhas.

ASSAM SEDUNDY CORPS

To give effect to the Minute of the Governor-General

1. Ibid.
2. F.P.O. 13 April 1836: No. 59.
measures were immediately taken in the Military Department. All
the four Sebundy companies and other irregular troops were
formed into a single corps for civil purposes, denominated the
Assam Sebundy Corps. The corps consisted of eight companies of
eighty men each with due proportion of native officers, havildars
and naiks. To complete the corps a detail of 115 men 4 drummers,
10 each of havildars and naiks and 2 subadars was drafted from
the A.L.I., which was then reduced to ten companies. The pay and
allowances of the Commanding Officer and the Adjutant and other
details were fixed on the lines laid down by the Governor-
General. The native officers and men continued to receive the
pay they had drawn while in the Sebundy companies. No camp equi-
page or a quarter-masters establishment was allowed. The corps
was armed with fusils. Captain V. Simonds, 21st N.I., was appoin-
ted Commandant of the corps and later Lieutenant Abbot, 44th
N.I., was attached to it as Adjutant.

Though an irregular corps for civil purposes, the Assam
Sebundy Corps, being liable to the Rules and Articles of War, was
under the control of the Commander-in-Chief. All minor military
offences were cognisable by Courts Martial assembled by order of

1. M.C. 13 April 1835: No. 155; O.O. by the Governor-General-in
Council, No. 98 of 1835.
2. Ibid.
the commanding officer. The authority of the magistrate was limited to the power of calling for detachments whenever required. Unlike the Local Corps the men of the Sebundy Corps, with the exception of those transferred to it from the former, were not entitled to pension or furlough. Though inferior to the Local Corps in respect of pay and privileges the duties it was called upon to perform were not dissimilar. On this ground Jenkins even recommended a change of title to the Kamroop Light Infantry.

Meanwhile the defence of the northern frontier continued to be unsatisfactory. In April 1835, the Kapachor Akas under Thagi Raja raided the house of one Madhu Saikia in Orung within fifty yards of the police post. It clearly showed that no effective protection had been afforded to the frontier villages. On 23 May, a gang of fifty Bhoities descended from the Bijn duar and carried off several persons. So great was the terror inspired by these repeated incursions that the frontier villages in many instances were completely deserted and a general feeling of insecurity rapidly extended along the whole line of the frontier. An attempt to establish an A.L.I. post at Bijn completely failed when a large proportion of the men, including

1. Ibid.
2. M.G. 31 August 1835: No. 58; Jenkins to Simonds.
the distinguished subadar of the post, Zalim Singh, fell a victim to its deadly climate. This confirmed the impolicy of employing the Local Corps on the Bhutan duara. The duty of protecting the frontier consequently fell on the Sebundies, which were then distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Troops</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Khari hills and Nowgong</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan and Darrang</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goalpara</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regimental and Station duties</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recruits, sick etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Evidently only 61 men remained at headquarters fit for duty. In January 1836, when Captain White wanted the Sebundies to relieve his A.L.I. from its duties in Nowgong, Captain Simonds, Commanding officer of the Sebundy Corps, found that he could spare no troops to do so. Captain Simonds lost no time in bringing to the notice of Jenkins the insufficiency of the Sebundy Corps. At least 4/5th of its numerical strength was always required.

1. Ibid: P. 20.
2. F.P.O. 14 March 1836: No. 92.
for outpost duties and the remaining 1/5th was inadequate for its relief except at very long intervals and in small portions. If the men remained detached for long periods and at considerable distances from their headquarters they would, wrote Simonds, loose whatever discipline they had acquired. Again, it was always desirable to have at headquarters a disposable force or about 200 men for any emergency. Captain Simonds, therefore, suggested that two more companies should be immediately added to the corps. In view of the great number of native officers required for detached duties Simonds also recommended that an additional havildar and one naik should be added to each company. Jenkins strongly recommended the measure and the Governor-General in Council sanctioned the proposal. The strength of the Sebundies was raised to 800 men by adding 20 men per company.

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid: No. 87; Jenkins to Maonaghten, 26 February.
3. Ibid: No. 94.