

HISTORY: FROM VAYU ISSUE-IV JUL/AUG 2008

LORE OF THE PIFFER GORKHA



150 Years of the 5th Gorkha Rifles [Frontier Force]

The First Battalion of the Fifth Gorkha Rifles celebrated the 150th Anniversary of their raising on 22 May 2008 in familiar environment, foothills of the Doon Valley not dissimilar to the foothills at Abbottabad, in the NWFP where for long existed their Regimental Centre. After 15 August 1947, this was moved to Dehra Dun and some decades later, to Happy Valley in Shillong.

Going back to the drab and desolate hills of the old Frontier of India began the story of the 5th Gorkha Rifles (Frontier Force), a fascinating record of 150 years, of bold and bloody battles fought in fantastic conditions; of valour and courage seldom equalled and hardly ever surpassed in military history; of silent and stealthy skirmishes in pitch darkness over grim gorges and winding trails; of heads carved up and throats slit with khukris; of numerous bayonet and butt fights and of bullets finding their mark at incredible ranges; and always of a valiant and wily foeman fought cleanly and chivalrously. Truly a story of far and fast marches, through mud, snow, rain and scorching heat, culminating in lightning thrusts; of crossings over rapid rivers and of climbing over perilous peaks; of cunning ambushes and audacious attacks; of dogged defences and grim withdrawals; of relentless pursuits and patrols and of yet more bolder

attacks—all so that honour and glory continue to bless the name and the fame of the Piffer Gorkhas.

Originally known as the 28th Punjab Infantry, or the Hazara Goorkha Battalion, they were raised in Abbottabad by Major HFM Boisragon as a ten company battalion—to be added to the Punjab Irregular Force—from transfers of their Gorkha personnel by twenty one regiments including police battalions plus the Hazara Mountain Battery. Over 90 per cent of the transfers were from the Punjab Irregular Force Infantry Regiments; and it was thoroughly understood that this Corps was primarily raised for 'prompt and active service' in the Punjab and the Trans-Indus Provinces, as well as beyond their limits should the exigencies of the service so require it. Thus came into being the only Gurkha Corps belonging to both the famous Gurkha Brigade and the renowned Punjab Frontier Force.

The genesis of these Companies was that, after the Second Anglo-Sikh War of 1849 and occupation of the Khalsa Kingdom, a large number of these Gurkhas (who had served in the Sikh Army) had settled in the Punjab and, when the uprising of 1857 broke out, they or their descendants became members of the Punjab Irregular Force infantry regiments.