

# MILITARY

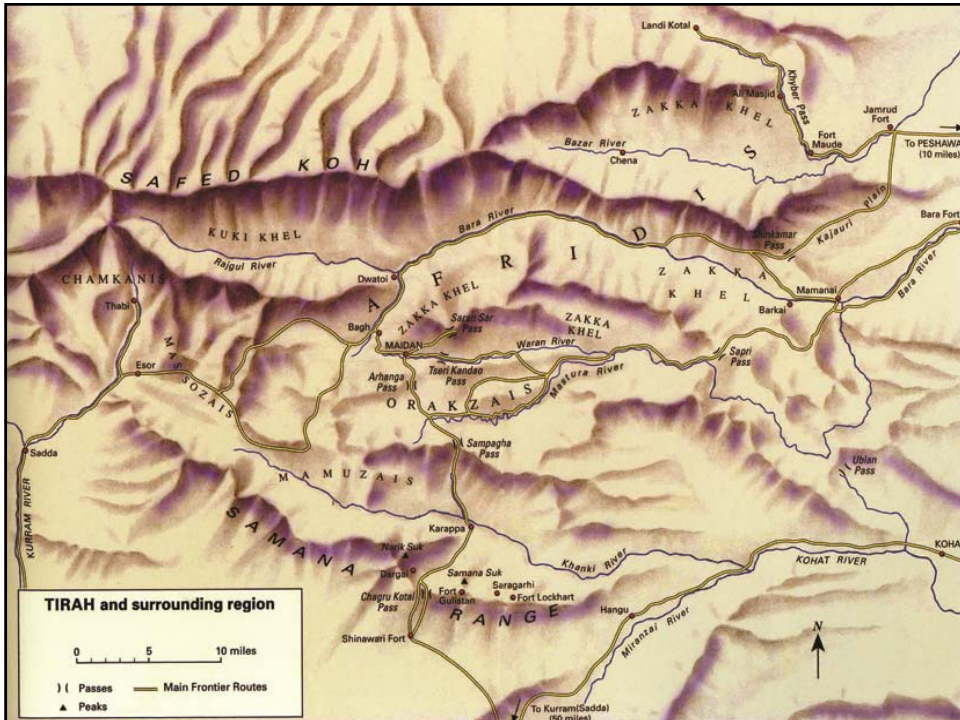
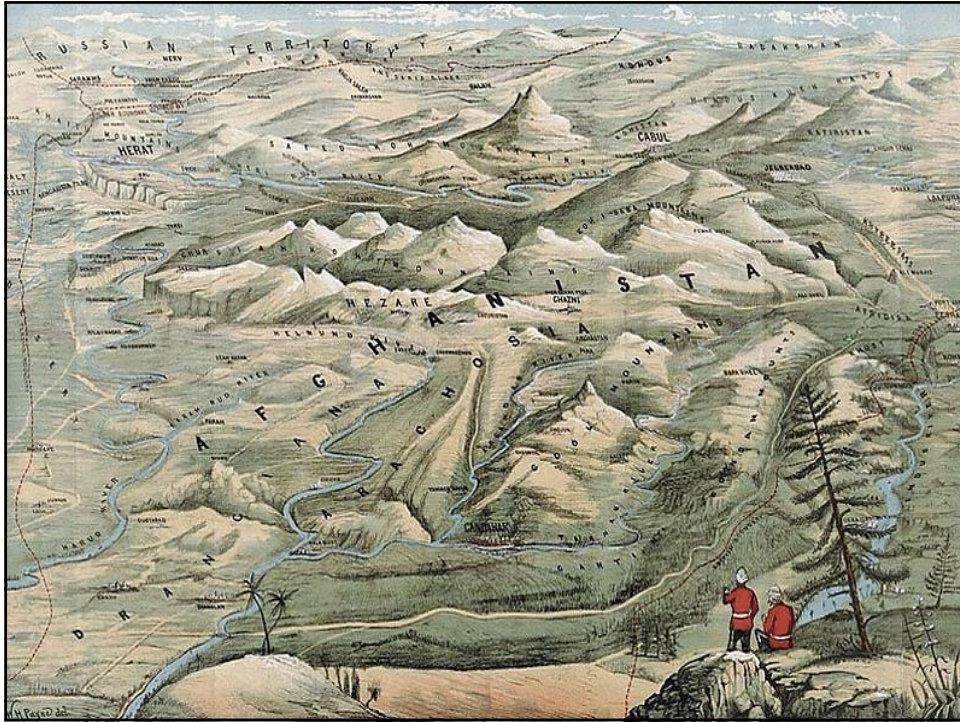
# HISTORY

## Battle of Saragarhi

### 12 September 1897







## Untamed people for an untamed land

- The Pashto-speaking people residing in the border region between the Hindu Kush in northeastern Afghanistan and the northern stretch of the Indus River in Pakistan have several names:
  - Pashtun (Pashto)
  - Pathan (Hindustani)
  - Afghan (Persian)
- Pashtun tradition claims descent from Israel's King Saul. Tribes trace male bloodlines from a common ancestor, and are divided into clans, subclans, and patriarchal families.
- About 36 million Pashtuns in some 60 tribes live today in Afghanistan (11 million) and Pakistan (25 million).

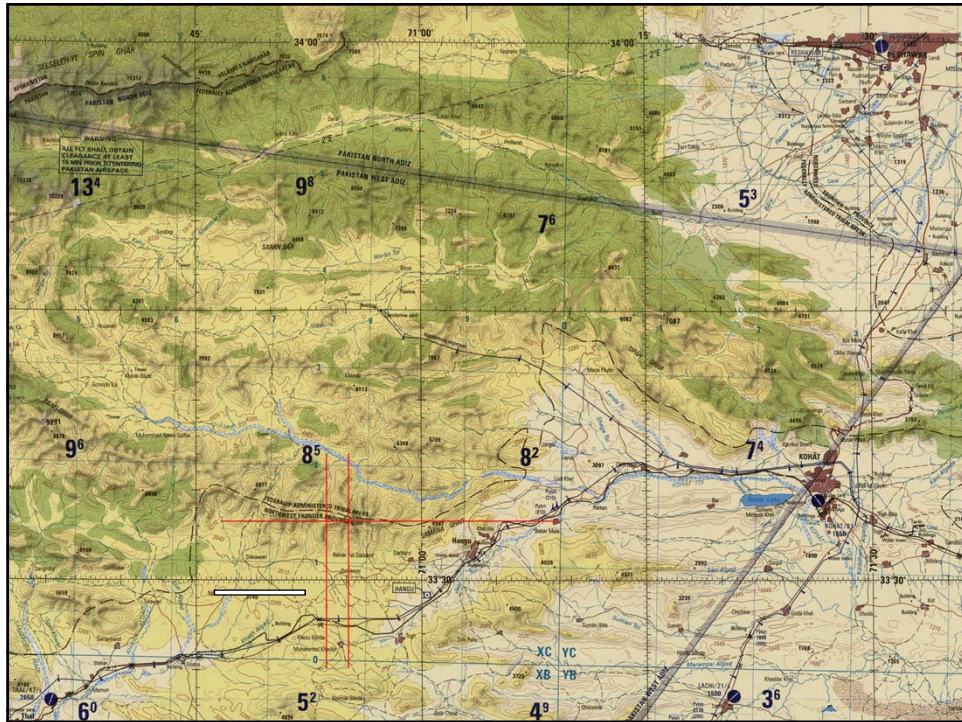


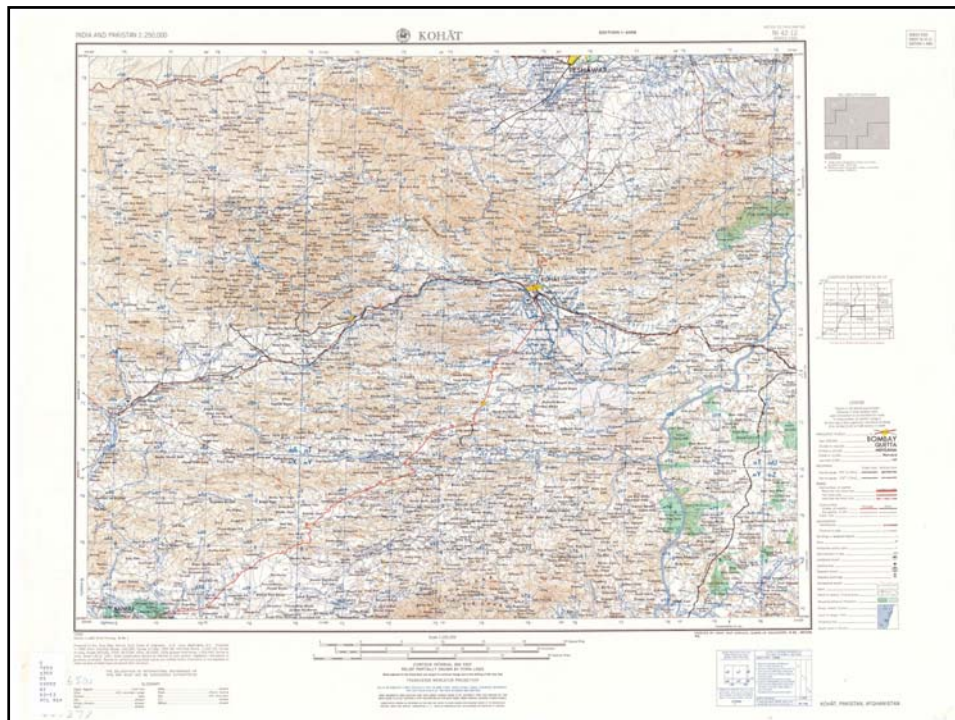
## The “Grim” (British India’s North West Frontier)

- The North-West Frontier (present-day Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) region of the British Indian Empire was a difficult area to conquer and to hold, whether strategically or militarily. As the western frontier between today's Pakistan and Afghanistan, it remains so. The border (“the Durand Line”) divides Pashtuns in Pakistan from Pashtuns in Afghanistan.
- The two main gateways on the North West Frontier are the Khyber and Bolan Passes, traditional invasion routes to the Indian subcontinent. Russian expansion into Central Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century made stability of the Frontier and control of Afghanistan cornerstones of British strategy. From 1849 until 1947, military history in the region was a succession of punitive expeditions against offending tribes, punctuated by three Anglo-Afghan Wars (1839–42; 1878–80; 1919) where the British tried to control Afghanistan. Other than many British officers learning soldiering, few ended well.
- “The largest and most serious outbreak of fighting on the North West Frontier during the colonial era was the Pathan Uprising of 1897–8. The revolt was actually a series of local insurrections involving over 200,000 fighters, including Afghan volunteers, and it required over 59,000 regular troops and 4,000 Imperial Service Troops to deal with it; the largest deployment in India since the Mutiny-Rebellion of 1857–8. Its outbreak proved such an unexpected and significant shock to the British that they conducted detailed enquiries after the event.”

Johnson, Robert A (2009). “The 1897 Revolt and Tirah Valley Operations from the Pashtun Perspective. Tribal Analysis Center, Williamsburg, VA.







## The British Army in India



### The British Army

Regiments of the British Army in garrison in India were increased following the Indian Mutiny of 1857. India became a Crown Colony. The ratio of British to Indian troops was increased from 1:10 to 1:3 by stationing more British regiments in India.

Brigade formations were a mixture of British and Indian regiments.

The artillery was put under the control of the Royal Artillery, other than some Indian Army mountain gun batteries.

### The Punjab Frontier Force

Known as 'Piffers', these were regiments formed specifically for service on the North-West Frontier and were controlled by the Punjab State Government.



### The Indian Army

After 1857, the Indian Army comprised the three armies of the Presidencies of Bombay, Madras and Bengal.

Senior regimental officers were British.

Soldiers were recruited from across the Indian sub-continent, with regiments recruiting nationalities, such as Sikhs, Punjabi Muslims, Pathans and Gurkhas.

The Indian Mutiny caused the British authorities to view the populations of the East and South of India as unreliable for military service.

### Imperial Service Troops of the various Indian states

nominally independent but under the protection and de facto control of the Government of India. Example: Kashmir.

## Military Organisation

- A British infantry battalion comprised 10 companies with around 30 officers and 700 men. A battalion had a Maxim machine gun detachment of 2 guns and around 20 men.
- Indian infantry battalions had much the same establishment, without the Maxim gun detachment, although several of the battalions might vary in numbers down to 400 to 500 all ranks. Senior officers were British, holding the Queen's Commissions. Junior officers were Indian.



Maxim Gun detachment of the Gordon Highlanders in 1895.

## Weapons

- In 1897, Indian infantry regiments carried the single shot, drop action Martini-Henry breech loading rifle. British regiments had received the new Lee Metford bolt action magazine rifle from 1894.
- The Indian cavalry regiments were armed with lance, sabre and carbine.
- By 1897, both Indian and British Royal Artillery Mountain Batteries used the RML (Rifled Muzzle Loading) 2.5 inch gun, the successor to the small, basic and unreliable RML 7 pounder gun, which had gone out of service in the British batteries in the early 1880s and, finally, in the Indian batteries in around 1895. The 2.5 inch had the nickname of 'the Screw Gun' as the barrel came in two sections that were screwed together for firing. The gun was dismantled for transport and carried by mules (see Kipling's poem 'the Screw Guns').



## The Martini-Henry .303 calibre Rifle

- Martini Henry rifles first entered service with the British Army in 1871 and quickly became its mainstay.
- Colonial units such as the Sikhs and Gurkhas only received them after all the British units were equipped. It had only been a few months since these frontier regiments were equipped with these rifles replacing the venerable Enfield.
- Capable of firing ten .303 calibre rounds a minute it proved to be more than a match to the antiquated muzzle loading rifles possessed by the tribesmen.
- The effective range of the Henry Martini rifle was 600 yards (550m).



## R.M.L. 2.5 Inch Screw Mountain Gun Mark II



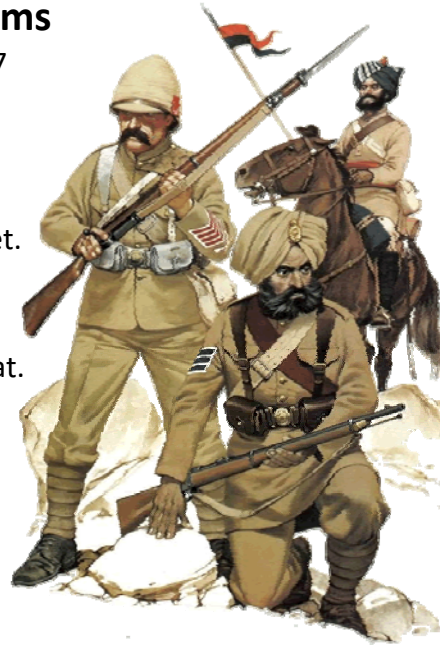
## R.M.L. 2.5 Inch Screw Mountain Gun Mark II

- **Ammunition:** a charge of 6 ounces of black powder fired projectiles.
  - Projectiles weighed 7.6 pounds with a  $\frac{1}{4}$  pound internal charge.
  - Shrapnel rounds weighed 7.6 pounds and carried 100 large and 22 smaller bullets with a 220 grain black powder charge.
  - Case shot weighed 6.7 pounds and contained 159 bullets.
  - Star shells also were made for this gun.
  - Projectiles were usually shipped in containers of eight each rounds.
- **Muzzle Velocity and Range:** The muzzle velocity of the gun was 1436 feet per second and its maximum range was 4,000 yards or 3400 yards for shrapnel with time fuse.
- **Weight:** The 7'5" long gun weighed about 200lbs, and with the carriage and wheels totalled 800lbs.
- **Transport:** One mule carried one of the portions of the barrel, one carried the carriage, one the two wheels, and one the axle, coupling block, trunnion guard, elevating gear (a wedge and screw design) and others carried tools, ammunition. In less than one minute, the gun could be taken off the mules, put together and an accurate shot fired from it.



## Uniforms

- British and Indian troops in 1897 wore khaki field dress when campaigning, with a leather harness to carry equipment and ammunition.
- British troops wore a pith helmet.
- Indian troops were largely turbaned.
- Gurkha troops wore a pill box hat.
- Scottish Highland regiments wore the kilt.
- Scottish Lowland Regiments, e.g. the Highland Light Infantry and the King's Own Scottish Borderers, wore tartan trews.



## Tactics

- The standard offensive tactic used against so-called 'semi-civilised enemies' (tribesmen armed with swords and lances and with limited access to modern firearms), was to deliver a frontal attack, discharging controlled volleys of rifle fire and charging home with the bayonet.
- When stationary under fire, cover was taken behind sangars or low, stone-built walls.
- Artillery provided supporting fire.
- Cavalry conducted scouting and, in suitable circumstances, charged which was particularly effective against loose formations of tribesmen caught in flat open country. The Indian cavalry regiments were adept at mixing mounted action with dismounted, in which carbine fire was used against tribesmen, particularly during a withdrawal.



- Military columns moving through hostile country must take care to ensure that flanking high ground was occupied in strength, until the column was clear of the area. This was a continuing issue.
- Troops were most vulnerable during withdrawal.
  - Experienced units made withdrawals by alternate leaps to ensure that a force always provided covering fire for the troops moving back.
  - Pathan tribes were quick to follow up British withdrawals and any error was immediately exploited.
- Many of the problems in battle for the British arose from inexperienced regiments failing to comply with the exacting requirements of frontier warfare.



- Pathan tribesmen fought on foot.
- During the Malakand campaign, it was estimated that only around half the tribesmen possessed firearms: muskets, jezails, some Sniders (Enfield rifled muskets converted to breach loading) and a few Martini-Henry rifles. Many fought with swords.
- The tribesmen possessed no artillery or machine guns.
- Flags representing villages, clans and tribes were carried in battle as rallying points. Drums of many sorts were beaten; pipes and trumpets played.
- A feature of warfare on the North-West Frontier was the tribesmen's ability to assemble in large numbers with little warning and to move at disconcerting speed across mountainous terrain, even at night.





## Troubles on the Northwest Frontier - 1897

- In 1893-4, Sir Mortimer Durand negotiated a border between India and Afghanistan (the Durand line) with the Emir of Afghanistan. Insufficient attention was paid to traditional tribal lands.
- Simmering tensions resulted in an almost general rebellion among the tribes on India's northwest frontier in 1897. The emir roused their jihadi spirit with news of Turkey's easy victory against Greece.
  - In June, an Indian patrol was attacked in the Tochi Valley.
  - July saw fortified posts at Chakdara and Malakand suddenly attacked by normally peaceful Swatis under Mullah Mastan ("Mad Mullah"). This was the start of Winston Churchill's "Malakand Uprising".
  - In August, the Mohmands raided Shabkadar a few miles outside Peshawar.
  - In August the Orakzais started besieging fortified posts on the Samana Ridge, including Forts Gulistan and Lockhart.
  - Then Afridi Pashtuns (paid by the British to safeguard the Khyber Pass by maintaining a local regiment), rebelled and all Khyber forts fell.

## The Tirah Expedition of 1897

- The town of Dargai six kilometers west of Saragarhi in northwest Pakistan's Malakand District was historically known as the last train station into Northern Pakistan. But ever since the British started campaigning against Malakand in 1852, Dargai is best remembered for one of the many battles there that occurred 18-20 October 1897 when despite heavy casualties the Gordon Highlanders and 2nd King Edward VII's Own Gurkha Rifles scaled the 300m high rocky outcrop against 8,000 Afridis after prior failed attacks.
- Four Victoria Crosses were awarded. The attack is immortalized in prose, verse and song.







## That's another battle for another time!

- This session will focus on a tiny battle that occurred five weeks earlier just 6 km east as the buzzards fly.
- No less hard fought, it involved a miniscule fraction of the number of British soldiers storming Dargai – fewer than 1% - but perhaps twice the number of Pathans.
- None of the 22 soldiers were British.
  - Twenty-one were Sikh.
  - Sepoy Dad was an untouchable.
- In the tiny outpost of Saragarhi they held out for seven hours against repeated assaults by as many as 15,000 attackers *to the last man, with the last round.*



**This is the battle we'll discuss today!**

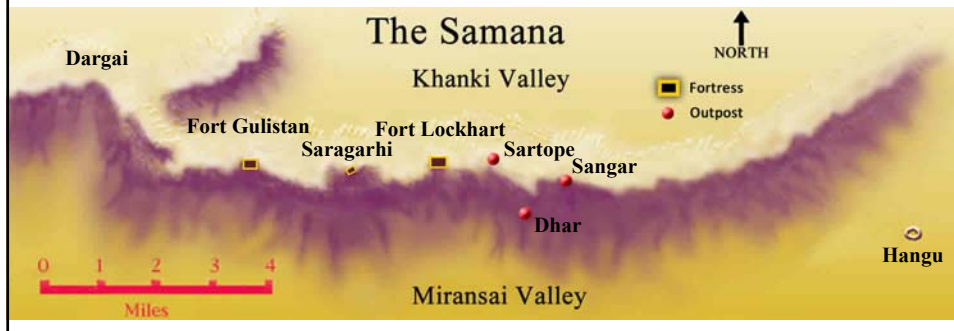
## Battle of Saragarhi (Tirah Campaign)

Belligerents	
 British Empire (British Raj) • Indian Army	 Afridi Orakzai tribesmen
Commanders and leaders	
 Havildar Ishar Singh †	Gul Badshah
Units involved	
 36th Sikh Regiment	Afridi Orakzais
Strength	
Havildar Ishar Singh†; Naik Lal Singh†; Lance Naik Chanda Singh†; Sepoys Sundar Singh†, Ram Singh†, Uttar Singh†, Sahib Singh†, Hira Singh†, Daya Singh†, Jivan Singh†, Bhola Singh†, Narayan Singh†, Gurmukh Singh†, Jivan Singh†, Gurmukh Singh†, Ram Singh†, Bhagwan Singh†, Bhagwan Singh†, Buta Singh†, Jivan Singh†, Nand Singh†, Dad†	6,000-15,000 (estimated)  600-1400 KIA Hundreds (thousands) wounded



## Scoping the battlefield

- Sikh Emperor Maharaja Ranjit Singh constructed a series of fortifications along the Hindu Kush ranges during his Western campaign. The British took them over after the Sikh empire declined. Among these were Fort Lockhart and Fort Gulistan (also known as Fort Cavagnari) on the Samana Ridge which divided Sikh territory from the Khanki Valley to the north.
- Lockhart held about 300 men and Gulistan, 200. The forts were only 3 miles apart but high ground between them prevented a visual line of sight. When telegraph wire between the two forts was cut by Orakzai tribesmen, a heliograph station was built between them at Saragarhi.



## Life on the Frontier

- In August 1897, the Samana was garrisoned by 5 companies of the 36th Sikhs, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel John Houghton, who was killed at Shinkamar the following year. He was supported by five British and seven Indian officers.

- Regimental headquarters were at Fort Lockhart under LTC Houghton and Lieutenant George Munn, Adjutant, along with five Indian officers.

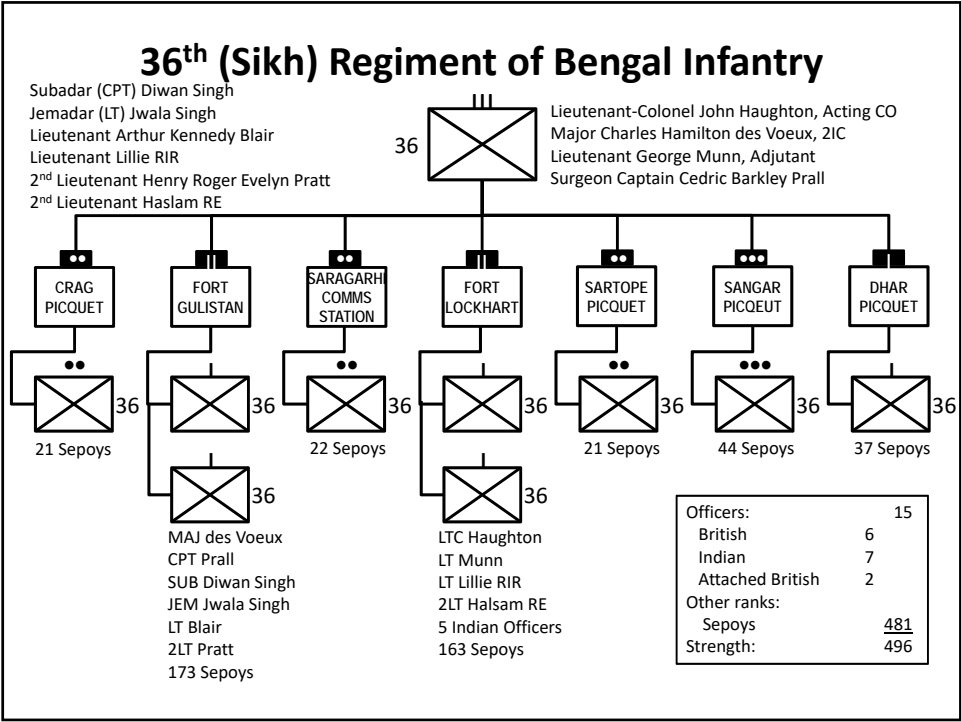
- Major Charles Des Voeux commanded Fort Gulistan, supported by Subadar (CPT) Diwan Singh, Jemadar (LT) Jwala Singh, LT Arthur Kennedy Blair, and 2LT Henry Roger Evelyn Pratt. Surgeon Captain Cedric Barkley Prall was stationed at Fort Gulistan.

Diwan Singh   Prall   Jwala Singh

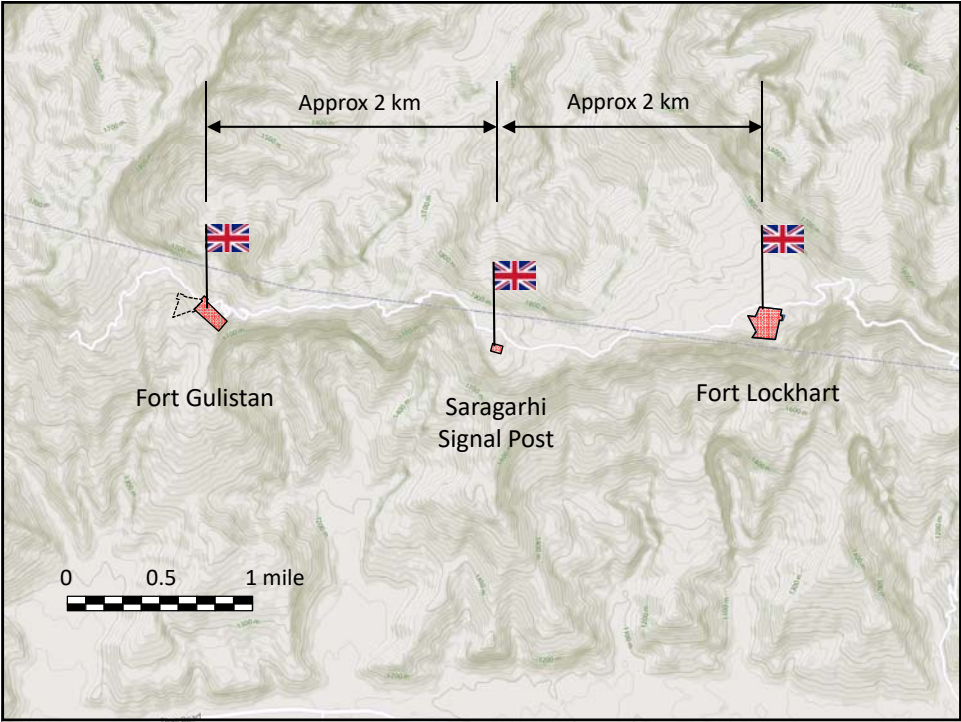
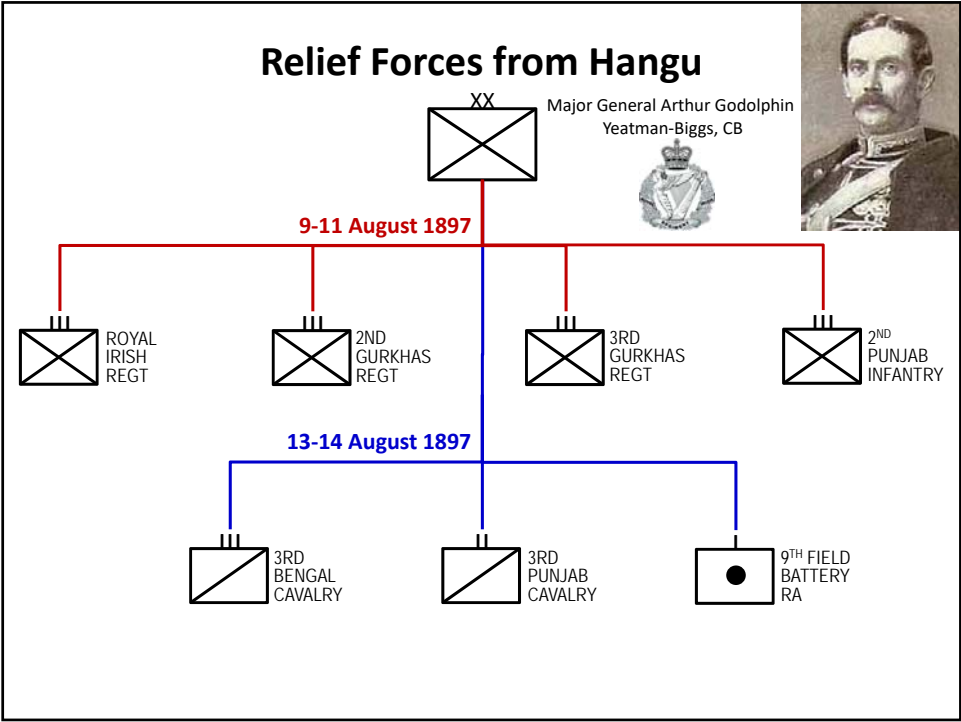


Blair   Des Voeux   Pratt

- While most of the military dependents had left, MAJ Des Vieux's pregnant wife Eleanor, children and nanny stayed in Fort Gulistan. She gave birth to daughter Violet Samana during a brief lull in the battle.









Google aerial photo of Fort Gulistan today

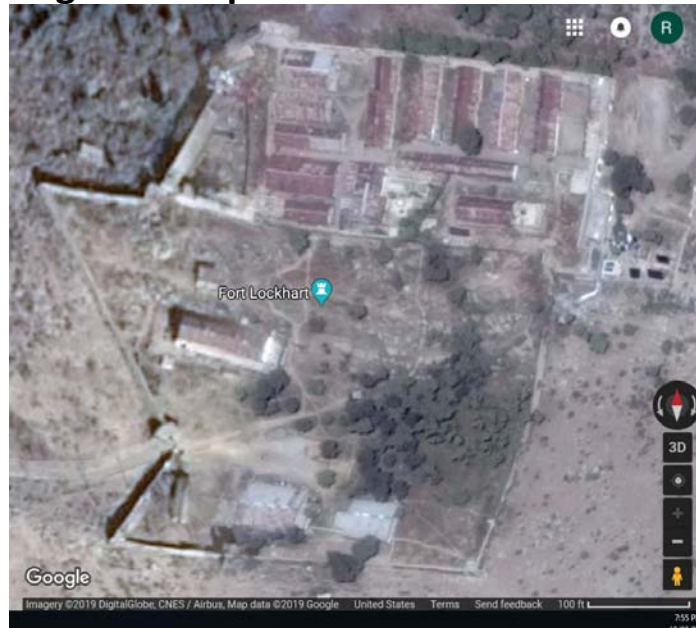


## Fort Lockhart from Saragarhi Outpost



FORT LOCKHART. (FROM SARAGARHI, SHOWING THE INTERVENING COUNTRY, WHICH COLONEL HAUGHTON HAD TO TRAVERSE TO RELIEVE SARAGARHI.)

## Google aerial photo of Fort Lockhart today





## Ruins of Saragarhi Signals Post 1897

Fort Lockhart



BUT THE WORSE WAS YET TO COME...

A COUPLE OF DAYS LATER, THOUSANDS OF AFRIDI TRIBESMEN WOULD JOIN THE RECENTLY DEFEATED ORAKZAIS. THEY WOULD MARCH BACK INTO THE KHANKI VALLEY FOR ANOTHER ASSAULT ON THE SAMANA RIDGE.

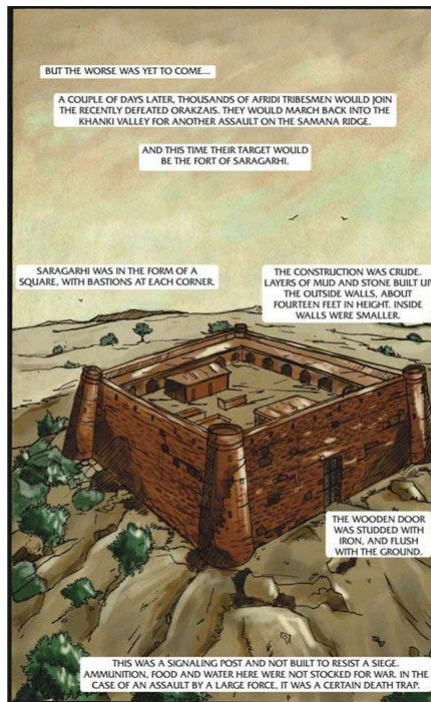
AND THIS TIME THEIR TARGET WOULD BE THE FORT OF SARAGARHI.

SARAGARHI WAS IN THE FORM OF A SQUARE, WITH BASTIONS AT EACH CORNER.

THE CONSTRUCTION WAS CRUDE. LAYERS OF MUD AND STONE BUILT UP THE OUTSIDE WALLS, ABOUT FOURTEEN FEET IN HEIGHT. INSIDE WALLS WERE SMALLER.

THE WOODEN DOOR WAS STUDDED WITH IRON, AND FLUSH WITH THE GROUND.

THIS WAS A SIGNALING POST AND NOT BUILT TO RESIST A SIEGE. AMMUNITION, FOOD AND WATER HERE WERE NOT STOCKED FOR WAR. IN THE CASE OF AN ASSAULT BY A LARGE FORCE, IT WAS A CERTAIN DEATH TRAP.





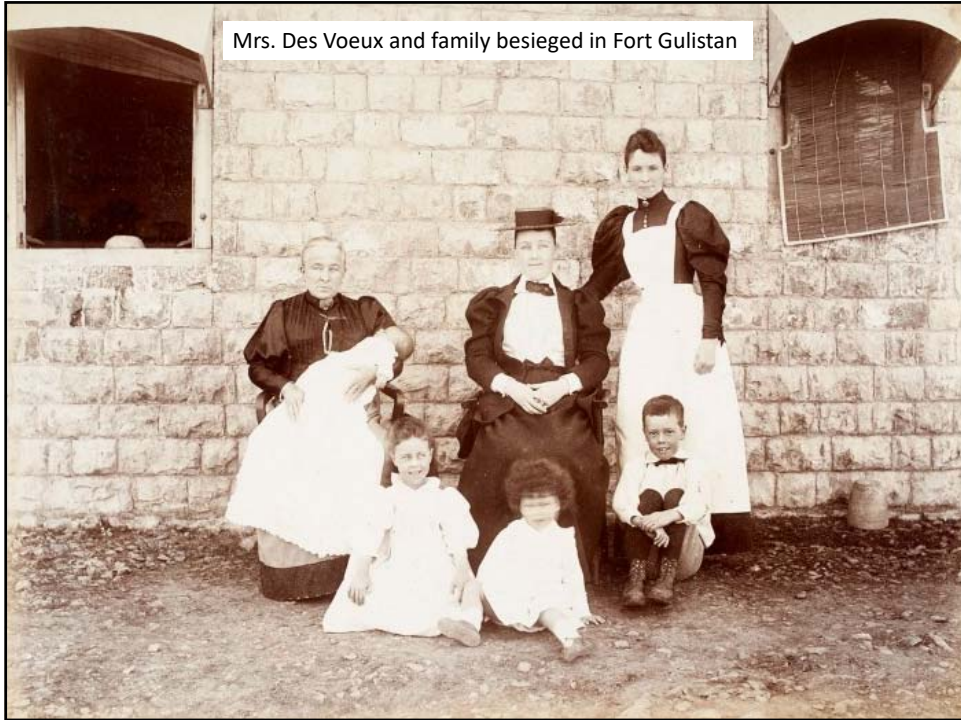
## THE QUEENSLANDER

Vol. LXL—No. 1131. BRISBANE: SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 1907. (Published for the Proprietor by J. H. B. at No. 1131, Queen Street, Brisbane.)

This week the centre of interest in the frontier campaign has again shifted to the Semana Range, where the force commanded by General Yeatman-Biggs has been briskly employed. The Orakzala and Afridis suddenly appeared before the line of hill forts in strong force, the lowest estimate of their numbers being 20,000. They selected first the weakest link in the chain, the little post of Saragari, one and a-half miles west of Fort Lockhart. Saragari formed an intermediate post between Fort Lockhart and Fort Cavagnari, at Gullistan. It was held by twenty-one Sepoys of the 36th Sikhs. A large body of Afridis advanced to attack it at 9 o'clock on Sunday morning. The fight went on all day, the handful of defenders holding out bravely against overwhelming odds. From Fort Lockhart a hundred rifles moved out to give assistance, but the plucky attempt was of no avail. The Afridis were soon swarming on the right flank of the relieving force, which was driven back by the immense numerical superiority of the enemy. Then the garrison at Fort Lockhart had to endure the terrible trial of watching the unequal fight, knowing they were powerless to give any aid. The signaller at Saragari kept up communications to the very last. The end came at half-past 4 in the afternoon, when the Afridis advanced to the assault for the third time. They carried scaling ladders, but first obtained entrance by bursting in the door. The garrison rushed to the door to repel the assailants, and the Afridis promptly escalated the walls. The gallant

Sikhs fell to a man, fighting hard. One brave fellow held out in the guard-room, and killed twenty of the enemy. He could not be conquered, and at last was burned at his post. The men died the death of heroes, and though the annals of the native army of India are full of brave deeds, they contain few nobler or more pathetic incidents than this. Meanwhile, Fort Cavagnari, which is held by 150 Sikhs under Major Des Voeux, was also being hard pressed. At noon on the same day a large throng of Afridis commenced to besiege it. The position of the defenders, with whom were Mrs. Des Voeux, a nurse named Miss Magrath, and four children, speedily became critical, for by 4 o'clock in the afternoon the Afridis had pushed up to within 10ft. of the walls, and were pouring in a heavy fire. They were, however, driven back. Next day they renewed the attack in thousands, having been reinforced by the men who had taken Saragari. Again they closed on the walls, but the undaunted garrison not only held them in check, but even assumed the offensive. A havildar and sixteen men boldly sallied forth, and charged with fixed bayonets a throng of 300 of the enemy only fifty yards away. Before the Afridis could recover from their surprise at this sudden diversion, the plucky little band had captured a standard, though ten of their number were wounded. Another havildar and ten men rushed out to their assistance, and actually succeeded in wresting three more standards from the enemy before retiring again to the shelter of the walls. But the continued strain began to tell on the garrison, and it became evident that succour must be sought. Under the pretence of sending for leave to surrender he got a messenger passed through the lines of the besiegers to Fort Lockhart. Thence the alarming news was sent to General Yeatman-Biggs at Hangu.





36<sup>th</sup> Sikh Regiment  
Non-commissioned Officers  
(Havildars)

36<sup>th</sup> Sikh Regiment  
Commissioned Officers





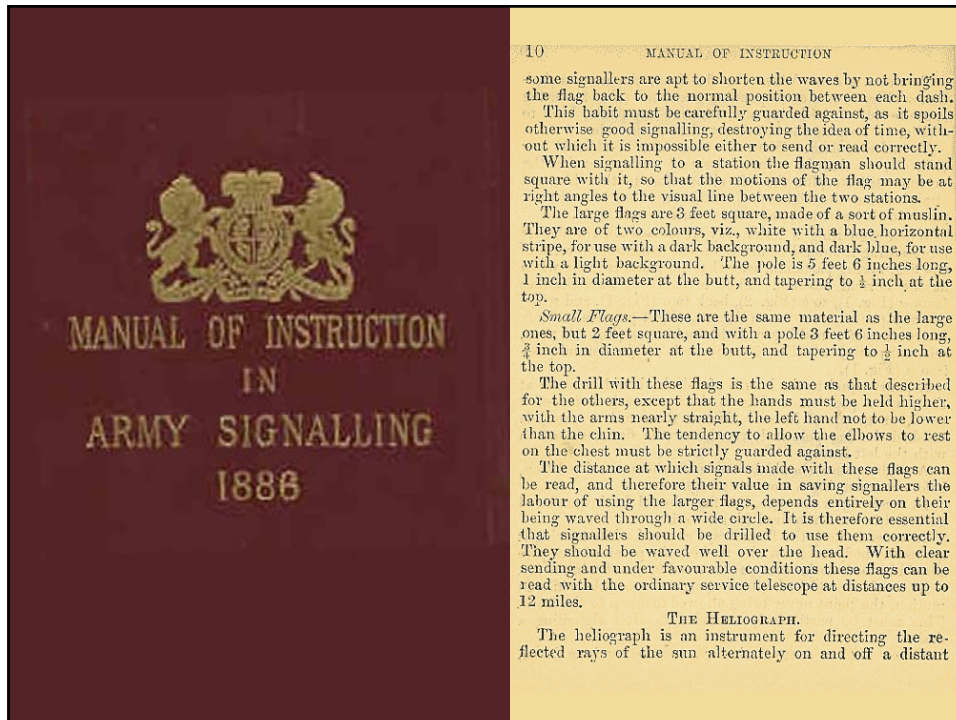
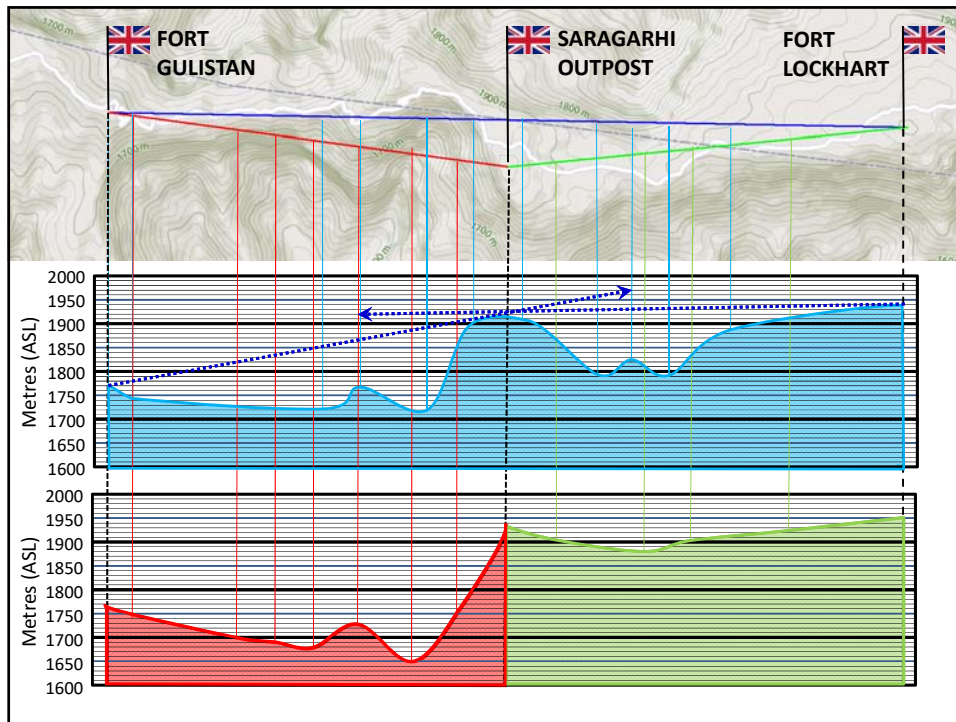
2.5" Mountain Gun



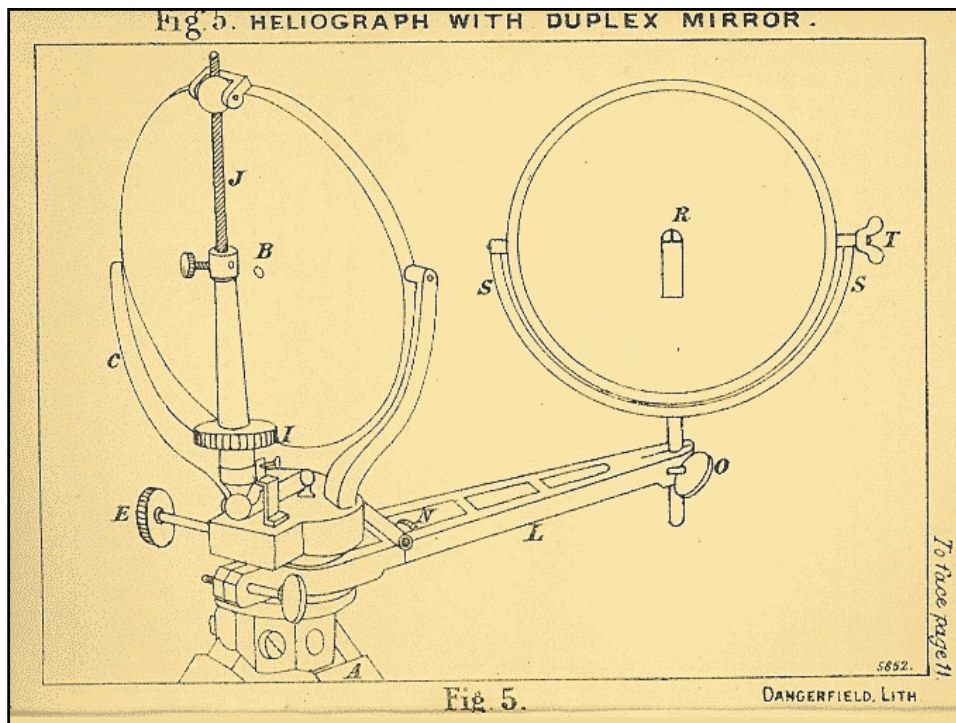
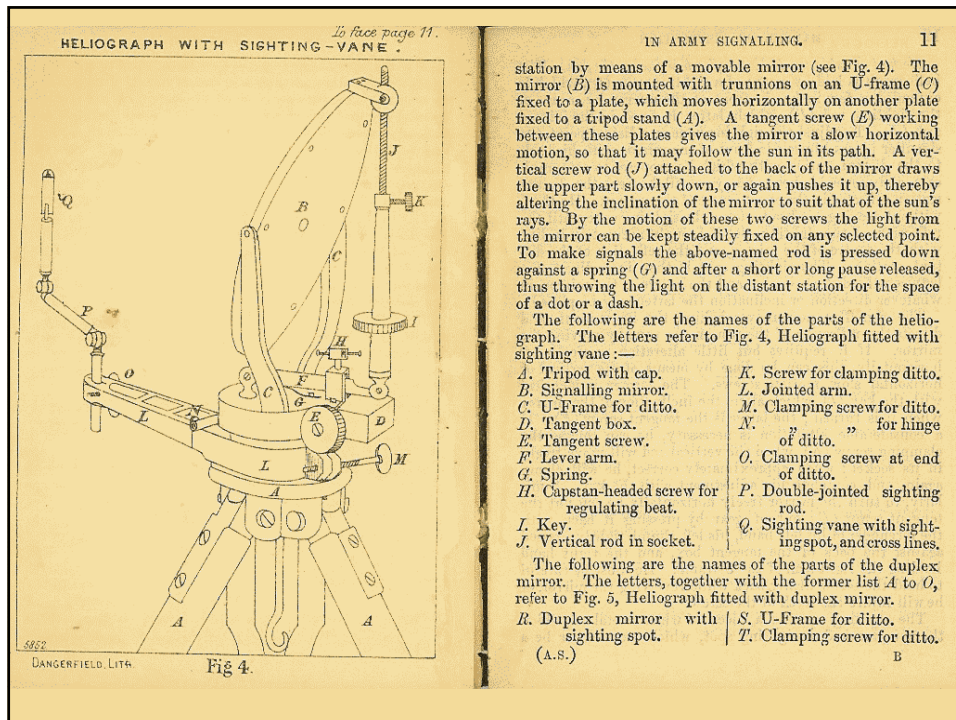
### Heliography in 1897

- Heliography reflects sunlight with a mirror and transmits it via coded messages using Morse code.
- The sole function of Saragarhi Outpost was to facilitate heliograph communication between Forts Gulistan and Lockhart. Saragarhi was vital in ensuring the survival of these two forts and the defence of the region.
- Saragarhi consisted of a small block house with loop-holed ramparts and a signalling tower. Its construction was probably similar to this one from the same era situated above the Chakdara Fort.
- It was approximately 30' wide x 40' long x 24' high, made from local rough hewn rocks and mortar. It had 18" inner walls and a 3' thick outer wall.







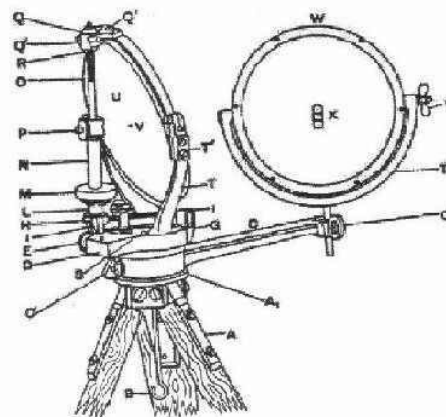






## Setting up Heliograph and stand.

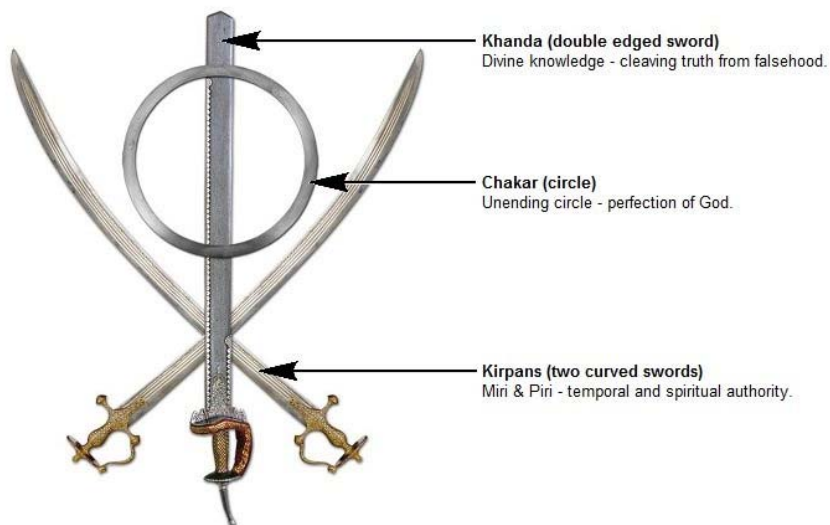
- |                                       |  |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| A. Stand. Al, brass head.             | O. Vertical screw rod                                      |
| B. Anchoring Hook                     | P. Clamping screw for vertical screw rod                   |
| C. Sight arm with clamping screw C'   | Q. German silver ball attached to claw Q'                  |
| D. Tangent box with lid below         | R. Adjustment screw for German silver ball                 |
| E. Tangent screw.                     | S. Base plate.   |
| F. Key.                               | T. U arms, with detachable portion T' and Screws adjusting |
| H. Key bridge.                        | -  |
| I. Key bearings                       | V. Unsilvered spot at centre of signalling mirror          |
| J. Beat regulating screw              | -  |
| K. Lock nut for beat regulating screw | W. Duplex mirror with frame in U arms (T)                  |
| L. Swivel joint                       | X. Sighting vane on duplex mirror                          |
| M. Collar                             | Y. Butterfly and pivoting screws                           |
| N. Vertical socket                    | Z. Sighting rod with moveable vanes Z'                     |



## Sikhism



## *Khanda - The Sikh Insignia*



- Weapons have a deep spiritual meaning within Sikhism.
- The kirpan is one of the articles of faith that every baptized Sikh Khalsa is required to carry at all times.
- While the spiritual significance of each specific weapon appearing on a Nishan Sahib is open to subjective personal interpretation, a clearly defined spiritual association between weapons and the Supreme Being was established early on in the development of the religion by the Sikh Gurus.



### **Sketches Chiefly Relating to the History, Religion, Learning, and Manners of the Hindoos**

*It is said that they have a sort of superstitious respect for their sword. It was by it they obtained their independence and power; and by it they preserve them. A Seik, though in other respects infinitely less scrupulous than any other Hindoo, before he will eat with any one of another religion, draws his sword, and passing it over the victuals, repeats some words of prayer, after which he will freely partake of them.*

Quintin Craufurd, 1790



### The Sikh Daily Prayer

- In the first lines of the Sikh daily prayer Ardas, Guru Gobind Singh asks Sikhs to remember the Supreme Being and all the Gurus. In referring to God, the Guru chose to use the unique metaphor of the sword (Bhagauti):

ੴ ਵਾਹਗੁਰੂ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਫਤਹਿ ॥

ਸ੍ਰੀ ਭਗੌਤੀ ਜੀ ਸਹਾਇ ॥

ਵਾਰ ਸ੍ਰੀ ਭਗੌਤੀ ਜੀ ਕੀ ਪਾਤਸ਼ਾਹੀ ੴ ॥

*Ekh-oonkaar Vaaheguroo jee kee Fat'eh.*

*Sree Bhagautee jee Sahaa-e.*

*Vaar Sree Bhagautee jee kee Paat'shaahee D'assveen*

*God is One. All victory is of the Wondrous Guru (God).*

*May the respected sword (God) help us!*

*Ode of the respected sword recited by the Tenth Guru*

ਪ੍ਰਿਥਮ ਭਗੌਤੀ ਸਿਮਰਿ ਕੇ ਗੁਰ ਨਾਨਕ ਲਈਂ ਧਿਆਇ ॥

ਫਿਰ ਅੰਗਦ ਗੁਰ ਤੇ ਅਮਰਦਾਸੁ ਰਾਮਦਾਸੇ ਹੋਈਂ ਸਹਾਇ ॥

*Pritham Bhagat'ee simar kaae Guroo Nanak laeen' D'hiaa-ae.*

*Phir Angad. Guroo t'ae Amar-Daas Ram-Daas-ae hoeen' sahaa-ae.*

*First remember the sword (God); then remember and meditate upon Guru Nanak.*

*Then remember and meditate upon Guru Angad, Guru Amar Das and Guru Ram Das: May they help us!*

## ਨਾਉ ਭਗਉਤੀ ਲੋਹੁ ਘੜਾਇਆ ॥

- *Nau bhagauti lohu gharaia*
- *Iron (a lowly metal) when properly wrought becomes a (powerful) sword.*

Bhai Gurdas, Varan XXV, 6

- The word “Bhagauti”, meaning sword, has been misinterpreted by some to suggest that it refers to a Hindu deity with a similar sounding name and that these lines are evidence that Sikhs are worshippers of this Hindu deity.
- Not true! The Sikh context of the word has an altogether different meaning. It means “sword”.

## Shastar Nam Mala Poem

*The Lord is One and the Victory is of the True Guru.*

*Shastra-Nama Mala Purana (the Rosary of the Names of weapons) is now composed with the support of the primal power by the Tenth King.*

*Couplet*

*O Lord ! Protect us by creating Saang, Sarohi (sword), Saif (straight sword), As (curved sword), Teer (arrow), tupak (gun), Talwaar (curved sword), Satratok (sword – destroyer of the enemy), Kavchantak (armour piercing sword) (all these weapons kindly) protect me. 1*

*O Lord ! Create As (curved sword), Kripan (sword), Dharaddhari, Sail, Soof (trident), Jamaadh (two blade dagger), Tegh (broad and straight sword), Teer (saber), Teer (arrow), Talwar (curved sword), causing the destruction of armours and enemies. 2.*

*As, Kripan (sword), Khanda (double edge straight sword), Khadag (sword), Tupak (gun), Tabar (battle axe), Teer (arrow), Saif (straight sword), Sarohi (sword) and Saihathi (spear), all these are our guide. 3*

*You are the Teer (arrow), You are Saihathi (spear), You are Tabar (battle axe), and Talwaar (curved sword); he, who remembers Your Name crosses the dreadful ocean of life and death. 4*

*You are death and you are the destroyer of death, Kali. You are the saber and arrow, You are the emblem of victory today and You are the bravest of warriors in the universe. 5*

*You are the Sool (trident), Saihathi (spear) and Tabar (battle axe), You are the Nikhang (quiver) and Baan (arrow), You are the Kataari (dagger), Sel (lance), and all and You are the Kard (small knife), and Kripaan (sword). 6*

*You are the arms and weapons, You are the Nikhang (quiver), and the Kavach (armour); You are the destroyer of the armours and You are also all pervading. 7*

*You are the cause of peace and prosperity and the essence of learning; You are the creator of all and the redeemer of all. 8.*

*You are the day and night and You are the creator of all the beings, causing disputes among them; You do all this in order to view Thy own sport. 9*

*O Lord ! Protect us by smashing the armour with the blows of Your hands with the help of As (curved sword), Kripaan (sword), Khanda (double edge straight sword), Kharag (sword), Saif (straight sword), Tegh (broad and straight sword), and Talwaar (curved sword). 10*

*You are Kataari (punch dagger), Jamdaadh (two blade dagger), Bichhuua (crooked dagger) and Baan (arrow), O power ! I am a humble servant of Thy Lord's feet, kindly Protect me. 11*

*You are Baank (sword), Bajar (mace), Bichhuua (crooked dagger), Tabar (battle axe), and Talwaar (curved sword), You are the kataari (punch dagger), and Saihathi (spear); Protect me. 12*

*You are Gurj (club), Gadaa (mace), Teer (arrow) and Tufang (matchlock musket); protect me ever considering me as Thy slave. 13*

*You the Chhurri (knife), the enemy-killing karad (small knife) and the Khanjar (dagger) are Your names; You are the adorable Power of the world, kindly protect me. 14*

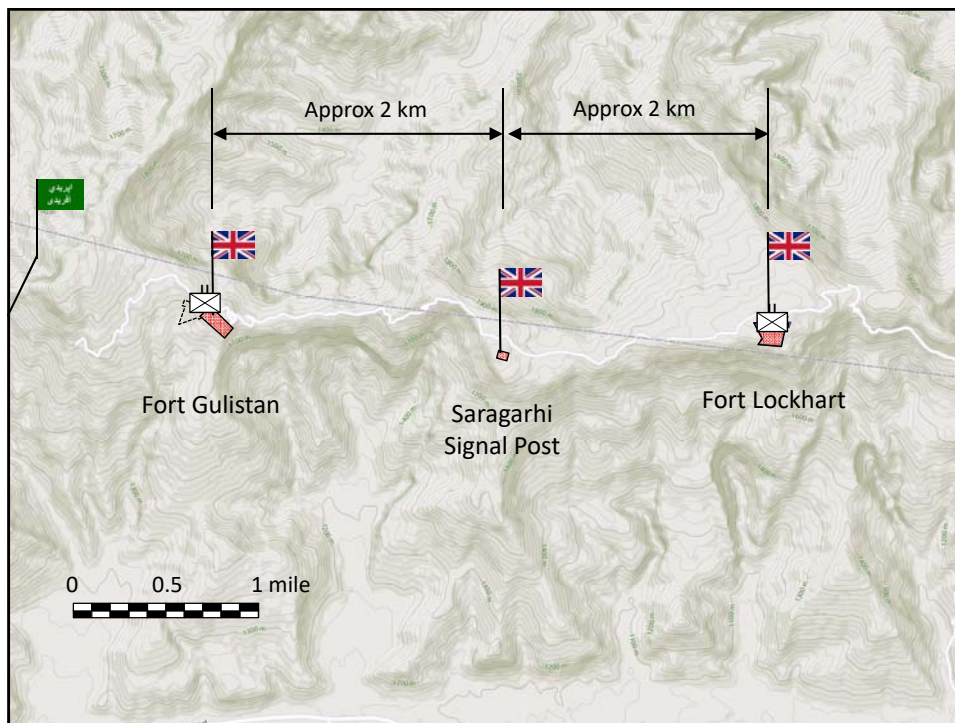
## **The Sikh Jaikara (shout of victory)**

- The Sikh slogan or jaikara (shout of victory, triumph or exultation) consists of two phrases.
- JO BOLE SO NIHAL! SAT SRI AKAL!
  - JO BOLE SO NIHAL!      Whoever utters the following shall be fulfilled.
  - SAT SRI AKAL!          Eternal is the Holy/Great Timeless Lord
- The complete phrase implies that one will be blessed eternally who says that God is the ultimate truth.
- In a normal situation, when two Sikhs meet they exchange greetings by saying "Sat Sri Akal."

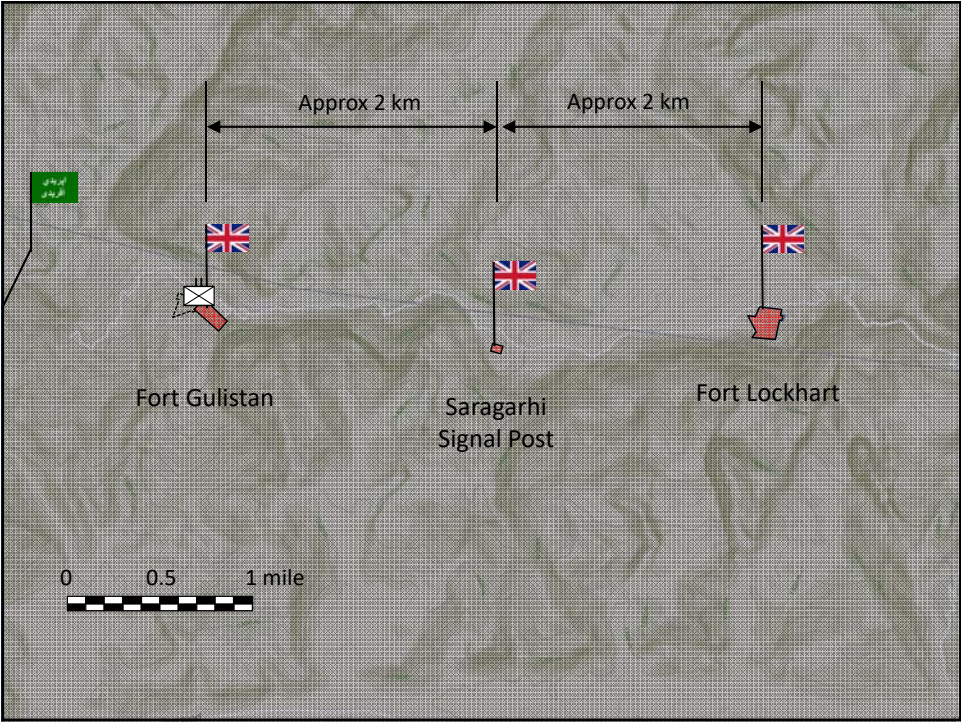
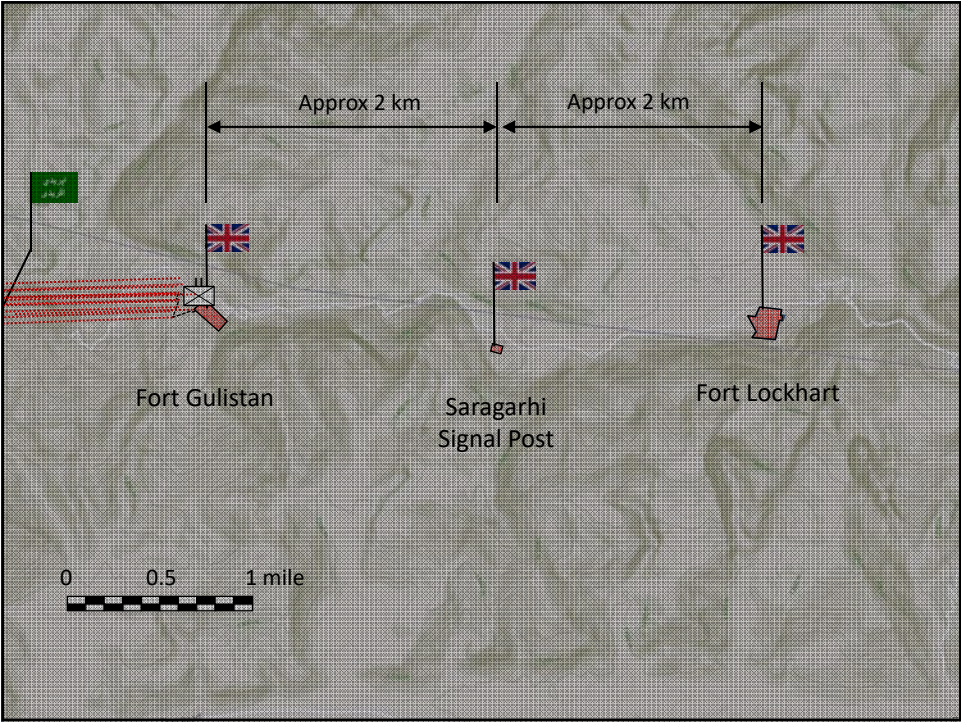


## Background

- Major Charles Des Veoux was assigned as 2IC of the 36<sup>th</sup> Sikhs at Delhi in August 1896, after being posted in Brisbane with the Queensland Defence Force from 1884-1891. His wife Eleanor Seymour Des Veoux and first two children had been born in Brisbane, as had Teresa McGrath, their nanny who had been a State orphan in Brisbane.
- The first sign of trouble was on 15th August when a few shots were fired into Fort Lockhart, there was a period of calm for a few days after that.
- On 27th August, 4,200 Orakzai tribesmen occupied high ground about a mile to the west of Gulistan.
- LTC Haughton went over to the fort with two officers and 134 men.







- Later the fort came under heavy fire from tribesmen who had reached high ground 1000 yds away.
- Lts Blair and Munn took 30 men to a rise called Piquet Hill 350 yds to the west of the fort, but Blair was shot in the lung and they returned.
- The tribesmen withdrew at about 6pm and Haughton went back to Fort Lockhart leaving Blair at Gulistan.
- Things quietened down for a few days during which time Major Des Voeux's wife gave birth to a daughter who they named Violet Samana. The lull ended on 3rd Sep
- The lull ended on 3rd September when a bhisti (water carrier) was killed and 5000 Orakzais were seen advancing on Fort Gulistan.
- Col Haughton again left Lockhart, taking 50 men, 15 of whom were left at Saraghari, to reinforce Gulistan.

- There was a hornwork\* on the west side of Fort Gulistan consisting of an enclosure 80 yards by 30 yards surrounded by a low stone wall on the three sides (the fort wall making up the fourth side). A thorn hedge was built outside the wall to impede attackers. The tribesmen managed to set fire to this hedge but the flames were extinguished by Sikhs working under heavy rifle fire.
- That night Orakzai firing increased and it was decided that a prearranged bonfire be set alight to provide some light in the way that flares are used now to illuminate approaching enemy troops. Two men volunteered for this suicidal task; Sepoy Ghula Singh and Sepoy Wariam Singh. They rushed towards the enemy and lit the fire before returning to the fort under a hail of bullets, reaching safety unharmed.

\* A freestanding fortification with angular points or horns serving to enclose an area immediately adjacent to a fort and add an extra layer of defence.



### **The First Relief of Samana**

- On the 9th Sept the sentries on the eastern outposts saw something that caused great excitement throughout the Samana fortifications. A large body of soldiers marching towards them under a British flag, about 2000 men of the Royal Irish Regiment, 2nd and 3rd Gurkhas, and 2nd Punjab Infantry commanded by Major-General Yeatman-Biggs. He was the senior officer in the area and he had brought supplies for a month to the Samana posts from Hangu. They stayed two days, during which time sappers improved the defences of Fort Gulistan.
- The Orakzais had been joined by a large number of Afridis and the Pathans now numbered 10,000.
- Yeatman-Biggs feared that they would cut off his route back to Hangu, and as there was insufficient water to supply his men on the Samana, he decided to return.

### **The siege resumes**

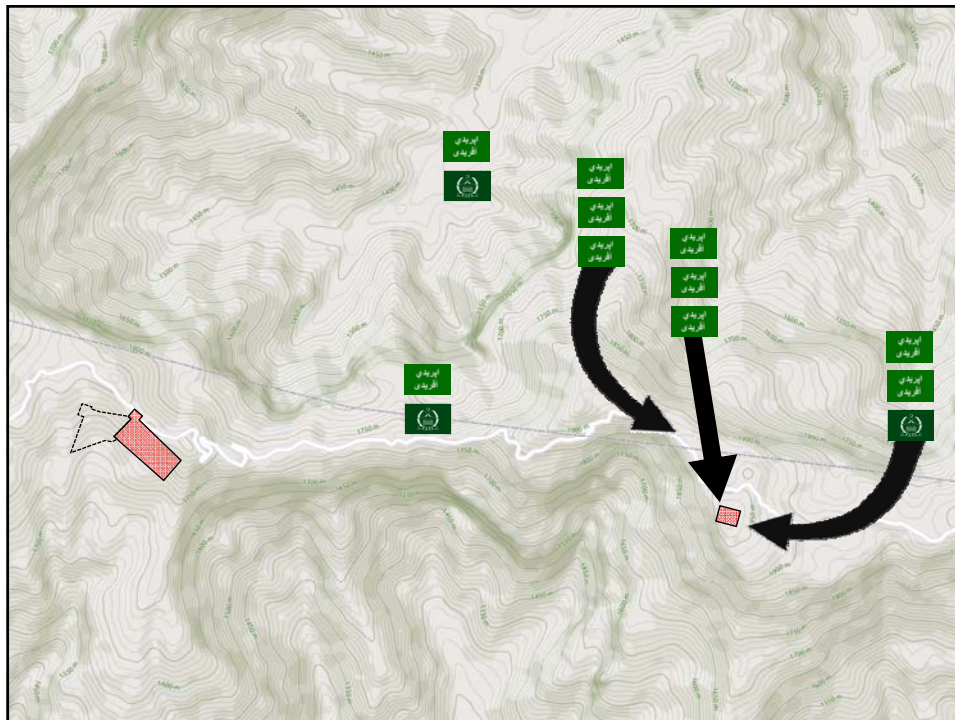
- But on the way to Hangu on the 11th and 12th, they clashed with tribesmen and casualties sustained were 6 Indian soldiers, a British officer and 8 other Indians wounded.
- The Pathans were encouraged by the apparent retreat of the British and renewed their attack on the 36th Sikhs. There were nearly 500 fighting men of the 36th there.
- A night attack on Sangar on 11th/12th Sept was unsuccessful.
- On 12 September, two Sikh cooks left Gulistan to find firewood and went missing. Their bodies were discovered several days later tied up and burned.
- Meanwhile the Pathans turned their attention to Saragarhi which they attacked in force.

### **The attack on Saragarhi**

- The Pathans then attacked the Saragarhi Signals Post in force.
- Around 0900, Havildar Ishar Singh peered through his binoculars from the watch tower and saw columns upon columns and rows upon rows of Pathans. around 15,000 strong, approaching the signalling post at Saragarhi. Officers at Forts Gulistan and Lockhart looked on.
- Sepoy Gurmukh Singh, the detachment signaller, went up the signalling tower to set up his heliograph and began signalling to Fort Lockhart about their predicament: "ENEMY APPROACHING THE MAIN GATE...NEED REINFORCEMENT".
- Lt Col Haughton attempted to rush troops to assist, but it was too late. The Pathans were swarming between Fort Lockhart and Saragarhi. Fort Lockhart transmitted back: "UNABLE TO BREAKTHROUGH...HOLD POSITION".

- Haughton in Fort Lockhart counted some 14 enemy standards (each representing 1,000 tribesmen) facing Saragarhi.
- Sepoy Gurmukh Singh passed this message to Havildar Ishar Singh. As he assessed the grim situation, Havildar Ishar Singh called upon his men to seek their consultation on whether to hold the fort or abandon their post in the hope of surviving.
- The Sikhs unanimously agreed to hold the position. Saragarhi flashed back: "UNDERSTOOD".
- Havildar Ishar Singh understood this terrain, the character and fighting ability of the Pathans, and the situation very well. He had planned to withstand an attack, and trained and drilled his troops.
- As the Pathans moved to began moving into formation, Havildar Ishar Singh had the bugler sound the attack, and the Sikhs rushed out of the tiny fort and formed two lines abreast, one row in a squatting firing position and the other standing. They held their fire until Ishar's command when the lead Pathans were 250 metres away.

- The .303 calibre was deadly and effective at this range, and the first line of Pathans was decimated.
- Twice more the Pathans were unable to make headway against the stout defence. But it came at a cost, with Bhagwan Singh killed and Naik Lal Singh badly wounded.
- Havildar Ishar Singh withdrew his men with Bhagwan's body into the fortification just ahead of the fourth attack.
- Mounting the firing step on the parapets, the embattled Sikhs fought off three more assaults, but continued taking casualties.
- Around 1200 hours, frustrated Pathan chieftain Gul Badshah ordered an all-out assault on all flanks, in order to force the defenders to divide their forces around the walls.
- The multi-pronged attack came in two main formations, one towards the main gate and the other towards the east wall.



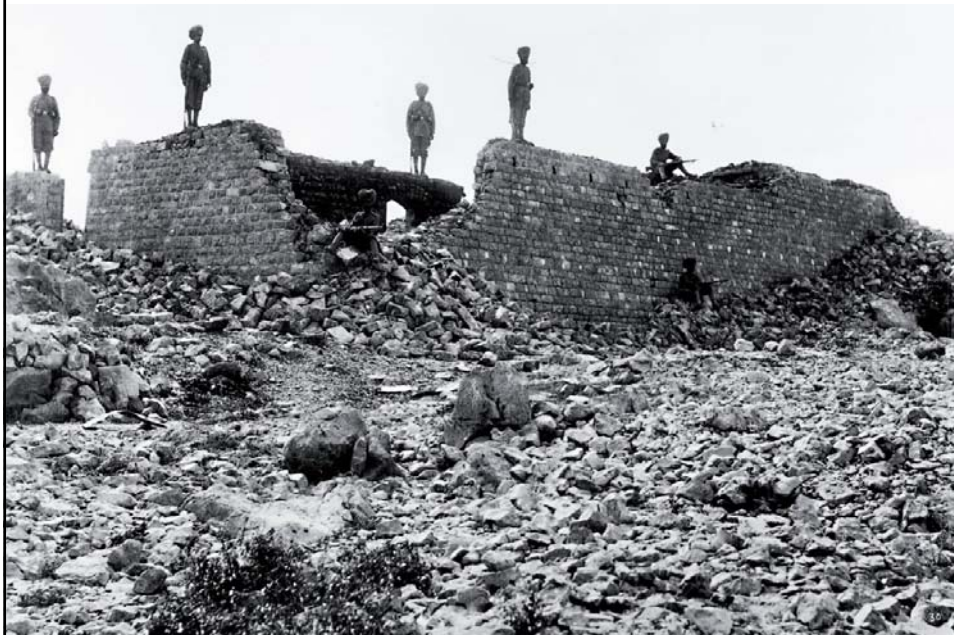


- Undeterred, Havildar Ishar Singh yelled their regiment battle cry together with his troops "JO BOLEY SO NIHAAL! SAT SRI AKAAL!" *Whoever utters the following phrase shall be fulfilled! True is the timeless being!*
- Although Pathans swarmed up to the walls, the tribesmen's attack was repulsed once again by the Sikhs, who were now down to just ten effective fighters.
- Dead and wounded Pathans lay in heaps right up to the outpost's walls. On one corner in sight of Fort Gulistan, Pathans started trying to pull rocks from the walls, but smoke, clouds and haze prevented heliograph signals from going out.
- The defenders were hurting, too. Out of 22 sepoys at the start of the battle, there now were only ten combatants.
- The battle had gone on from 0900 hrs to 1200 hrs with the Sikhs having fought off seven charges by the tribesmen.

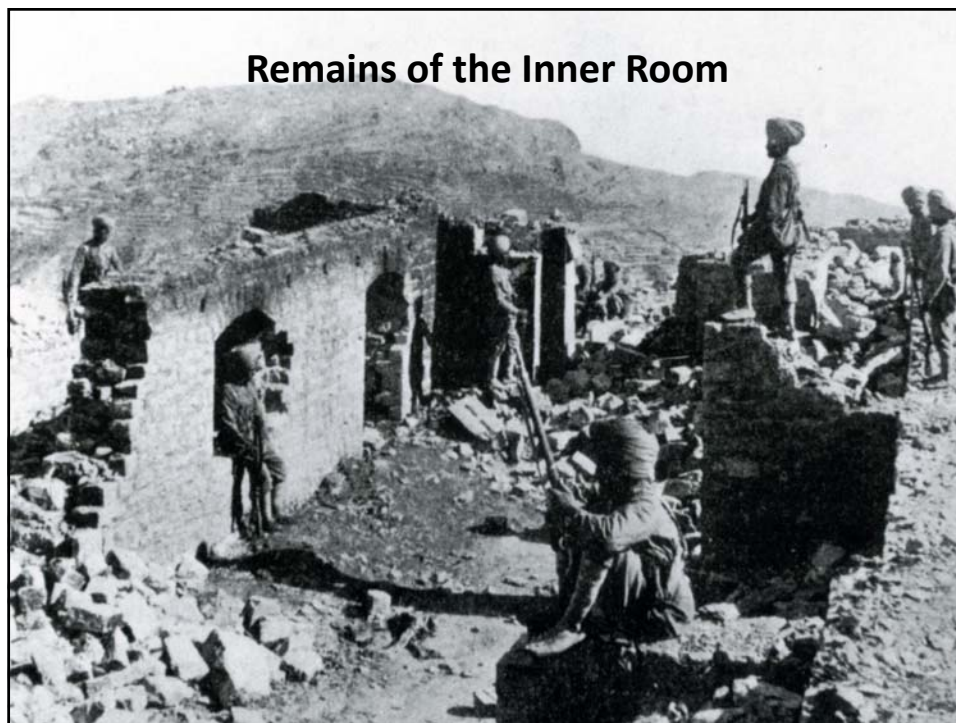
- As the Pathans attacked again, the ten remaining Sikhs put up a stiff resistance and managed to repel the attack once again.
- Before expiring, Naik Lal Singh, severely wounded hours before, shot four Pathans from his stretcher.
- Still the battle raged. Though severely wounded by bullets and sabre slashes, Havildar Ishar Singh was still in charge.
- At 1400 hrs, Sepoy Gurmukh Singh signaled Fort Lockhart Battalion HQ: "LOW ON AMMO...NEED AMMO...URGENTLY".
- LTC Haughton despatched a party to get ammunition to the outpost, but sheer numbers turned them back.
- At 1500, LTC Haughton led a sortie of 93 men to relieve Saragarhi, but they couldn't break through.
- The tribesmen resorted to a traditional tactic. They set fire to the bushes and scrubs around Fort Saragarhi. Clouds of smoke blanketed the fort, making it impossible to see the enemy.

- Despite the smoke, soldiers at Fort Lockhart could see the tribesmen approach Saragarhi and those at Fort Gulistan could see the corner wall being pulled apart.
- Both frantically signalled Saragarhi: "ENEMY APPROACHING THE BREACH" but smoke prevented a reply.
- At 1530 the corner of the Saragarhi fortification collapsed and the enemy poured into Saragarhi, forcing open the gate. The remaining men fought a desperate hand-to-hand fight with their remaining bullets and their bayonets.
- The sheer weight of numbers made the end inevitable, but Pathans were falling in the dozens.
- Mortally wounded, Havildar Ishar Singh ordered his last five men to drag him to the breach and then fall back into the inner arms room, whilst he covered their withdrawal.
- Armed with swords in both hands, he charged the tribesmen and battled the Pathans until his remaining men were in the inner building.

**The collapsed corner near the breached door.**



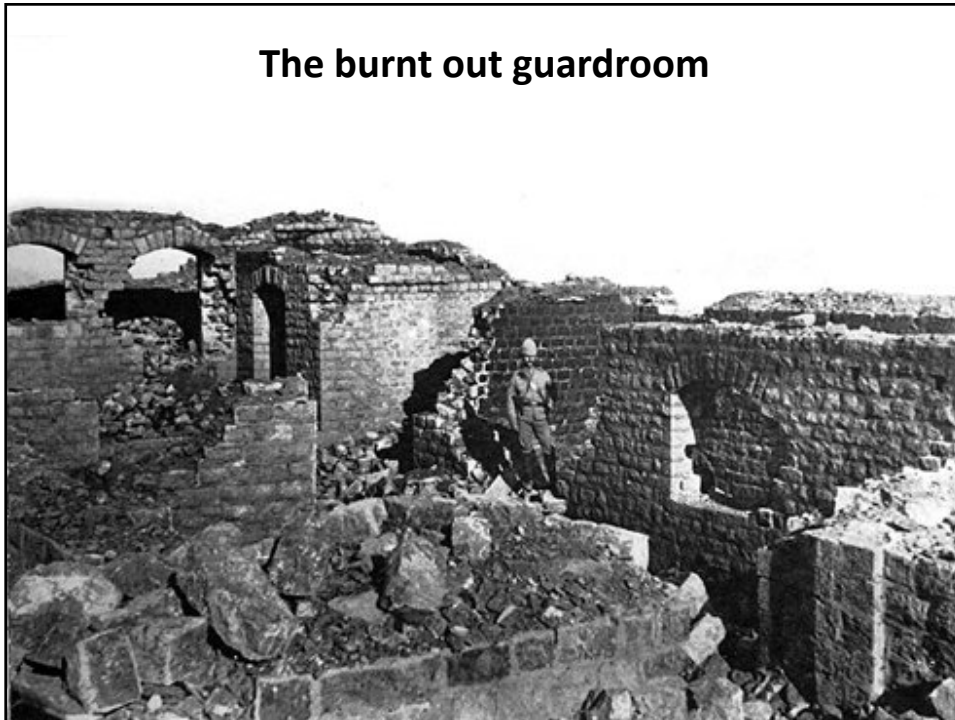
- By the time the tribesmen breached the fort, only five Sikhs remained alive. Four in the inner building and Sepoy Gurmukh Singh at the signalling tower.
- The Sikhs did not give up. Instead they formed an all-round defensive position with their backs against each other and their bayonets pointing outwards. In this remarkable display the four Sikhs fought hand to hand inside the fort.
- However, this defence was breached and all but one of the defending soldiers were killed, along with many of the Pashtuns. Gurmukh Singh, who communicated throughout the battle with LTC Haughton, was the last Sikh defender.
- At 1530 hrs Sepoy Gurmukh Singh transmitted: "MAIN GATE BREACHED...DOWN TO ONE...REQUEST PERMISSION TO DISMOUNT AND JOIN THE FIGHT".
- Orders came back: "PERMISSION GRANTED".





- Sepoy Gurmukh Singh disassembled his heliograph device, picked up his rifle and bayonet and climbed down from the signalling tower to join the fight.
- Soldiers at Fort Lockhart saw him disappear into the thick of battle right into the tribesmen line. His last words echoed "JO BOLEY SO NIHAL! SAT SRI AKAL!"
- The youngest of the Sikhs at 19 years old, Sepoy Gurmukh Singh fought through the Pathans and locked himself in the guardroom. He managed to shoot at least 20 Pathans, but they set fire to the building and left him to burn to death. He was the last to fall at Saragarhi.
- As he was dying he was said to have yelled repeatedly the regimental battle-cry "Jo Bole So Nihal, Sat Sri Akal (He who cries God is Truth, is ever victorious). and they were all killed.

**The burnt out guardroom**



## Defence of Fort Gulistan

- After the fall of Saragarhi, the Orakzais and Afridis turned their attention to Gulistan.
- Major Des Voeux posted men at the base of the corners of the fort to listen for any sign of tampering with the stones on the outside. The tribesmen concentrated their fire on the fort and this continued into the night, wounding several Sikhs.
- Daylight showed that the attackers had built stone sangars for cover during the night and the nearest one was only 20 yards from the hornwork.
- It was decided that an attack had to be made on this sangar and Havildar Kala Singh volunteered to take 16 men to carry it out. At 8am on the 13th they made the sortie, charging towards the sangar, but heavy fire wounded several of them and forced the others to stay flat on the ground.



## Defence of Fort Gulistan

- Another havildar, Sunder Singh saw this and without waiting for orders, took 11 men to help them. A concerted effort was made and the sangar was reached. They drove out the tribesmen capturing 3 Pathan standards in the process, returning to the fort in triumph.
- Unfortunately, two men had been left behind, wounded.
- When he realised this, a sepoy called Bela Singh leapt over the wall and, joined by two of the Sikhs who had just returned from the sortie, brought the wounded men back to safety.
- Of the 29 men who had taken part in this action, 14 were wounded, 3 of them fatally. One of these three was Havildar Kala Singh, the original volunteer; he died on the 15th September. Their efforts had a positive effect on the morale of the regiment and made the Pathans more cautious.





### Help is sent

- The defenders were under constant rifle fire for the rest of the day and all that night. Twenty-five more men were wounded, adding to the casualties being tended by Surgeon Captain Prall and Mrs Des Vouex's nursemaid, Teresa McGrath.
- Water was running short and no help could be supplied from Fort Lockhart as it was too dangerous to put troops in the open ground between the forts.
- General Yeatman-Biggs received news of their plight and sent the 3rd Bengal Cavalry, a squadron of the 3rd Punjab Cavalry and four guns of the 9th Field Battery RA down the Miranzai Valley to give support to Fort Gulistan. The artillery fired some long range shells at 7 pm on the 13th, hitting few tribesmen but raising the spirits of the besieged men and causing the Pathans to be confused about the direction from which the relief troops would come.



- Yeatman-Biggs set out with the main relief force at first light.
- Sangar was the first post to be relieved at 0800 on the 14th. The 44 men there had suffered no casualties.
- Yeatman-Biggs and his relief force reached Lockhart by 1000.
- When LTC Houghton saw that relief was at hand he sallied out of Fort Lockhart with about 50 men, firing on the retreating Pathans.
- General Yeatman-Bates, LTC Houghton and the relief force moved on to Saragarhi where they found no survivors.
- They then moved on to relieve Fort Gulistan, which was holding out against the 8,000 surviving Orakzais and Afridis.
- Momentum had decidedly shifted towards the defenders, thanks to the seven hours of sacrifice by Havildar and his 21 men at Saragarhi.

- Four guns of No 2 (Derajat) Mountain Battery were part of Yeatman-Biggs's force and they were put to good use, causing the enemy to retreat.



- The relief force reached Fort Gulistan at 1300 pm on the 14th September 1897, thus ending the siege. The 36th Sikhs had been under continuous fire since 9 am on the 12th, a total of 52 hours. During that time, 39 rank and file Sikhs had been wounded plus one Indian Officer. Of these, at least 4 died of their wounds, bringing the total fatalities, with the 21 at Saragarhi, to 25. None of the civilians, apart from the poor cooks, was hurt.
- Without the stiff resistance of the 21 Sikh soldiers at Saragarhi both Fort Lockhart and Fort Gulistan would likely have fallen. By defending their position long enough for the relief column to arrive with artillery support, the 21 Sikh soldiers became the crucial factor in turning the tide of battle in their favour.
- When the relief column arrived a day later, they saw the burnt out bodies of all the 21 Sikh soldiers, together with at least 800 dead bodies of the tribesmen strewn only yards in front of their position.



## Aftermath



### Officer survivors at Fort Gulistan

(Lieutenant Blair (lower left), severely wounded;  
Major Des Voeux (lower centre) whose after action report is next)

*"Fort Cavagnari, north of Kohat, September 18...We have had severe fighting here. We were attacked and closely invested for three days – September 12,13 and 14, when we were relieved. We were cut off from water all that time, though I had enough, luckily, to go on with by putting all on an allowance. We had no water at all for mules and horses, and no food for animals, as the enemy burnt it. The fort next to us, with 21 men of mine and one follower, was taken by storm and fell at 3.40p.m. on the 12<sup>th</sup>. The whole garrison were killed. I heard they died fighting like demons. My men here fought like tigers, but we lost heavily, 44 out of 165, killed, wounded and missing. Things were very serious, indeed, but my men pulled me through. The enemy were all round, within 20 yards, well under cover, and firing like mad. I ordered a sortie at 8 a.m. on the 13<sup>th</sup>, as the enemy were getting too close, and it was carried out with the most gallant splendid gallantry, and we captured three standards. Teresa (Mrs. Des Voeux's nurse) surpassed herself attending to the sick and wounded. Her name has gone forward for reward, and I hope she will get it. She will certainly get the medal, and probably an order. I have recommended 30 of my men for the order of merit (The Indian Victoria Cross)...A good many of my poor wounded are dead or dying; the rest have been sent to Fort Lockhart. A good deal of fighting is expected in Tirah, though, personally, I do not think they will stand against us long. I had 10,000 men all round me for three days, and we held out; they could have taken the fort easily if they had had the pluck. We killed and wounded 200 of the enemy."* Major C. Des Voeux



## Aftermath

- All the 21 Sikh non-commissioned officers and soldiers who laid down their lives in the Battle of Saragarhi were posthumously awarded the Indian Order of Merit.
- The Indian Order of Merit was the highest gallantry award of that time which an Indian soldier could receive by the hands of the British crown.

The corresponding British gallantry award was the Victoria Cross.



The Indian Order of Merit Sepoy Harnam Singh, 36th Sikh Regiment, earned at Fort Gulistan on 13 September 1897.

This was not the last action of the 36th during the Tirah Campaign. Over the next few months they took part in some of the heaviest fighting.

- Lieutenant Munn was severely wounded in the Waran Valley on 16th November.
- In the last action of the campaign, Lieutenant-Colonel John Haughton was killed leading the 36<sup>th</sup> on 29 January 1898, whilst reconnoitering some caves beyond the Shinkamar pass.
- Major Charles Des Voeux was quickly promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. In 1904, he became a Major General commanding the Mhow Division, retiring in 1911 as Lieut. General Charles Des Voeux, CB.

