

## THE CLASSIC INGREDIENTS OF MUTINY IN THE INDIAN ARMY

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### INTRODUCTION

Besides the great Mutiny of 1857-1861, troubles occasionally occurred in the Indian Army throughout its existence as a colonial military establishment. On every occasion when there was mutiny there had been present in some degree three classical factors.<sup>1</sup> These were ineffective officers, a general political unease or some general grievance in the villages, and a direct military grievance as the immediate spark. This article surveys the genesis of the February 1915 incident at Singapore, so as to find out whether the above classical factors were the ingredients that incited men of the 5th Light Infantry and men of the Mountain Battery of the Malay States Guides to mutiny.

The 5th Light Infantry was raised in 1803, as part of the Bengal Native Infantry, Bengal Army.<sup>2</sup> The regiment which was then known the 2nd Battalion 21st Regiment Bengal Native Infantry was awarded the distinction of being Light Infantry in 1842. The regiment was renamed as the 42nd Native Infantry and carried as battle honours 'Cabool 1842'<sup>3</sup> and the great battles of the First Sikh Wars. These includes the battle awards of Moodkee, Ferozeshuhur and Sobraon in 1846. Almost all regiments of the Bengal Army faced disbandment during and after the Mutiny of 1857-1861, but the 42nd had survived after which it was numbered the 5th Bengal Native Light Infantry in 1861. In 1885, the word 'Native' was dropped, and after the army reforms of 1902, the regiment became known simply as the 5th Light Infantry. It again

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<sup>1</sup>For accounts on these mutinies see J.W. Kaye, *History of the Sepoy War in India 1857-1858* (London: 1880); H. Dodwell, *Sepoy Recruitment in the Old Madras Army* (Calcutta 1922); T.A. Heathcole, *The Indian Army: The Garrison of British Imperial India 1922-1922* (Vancouver: 1974); and P. Mason, *A Matter of Honour* (London: 1974).

<sup>2</sup>The Indian Army was raised under three separate organizations in the Presidencies of Bengal, Madras and Bombay. Each Army had its own commander-in-chief and three lists of officers. The three armies were amalgamated only in 1985.

<sup>3</sup>'Cabool 1842' was among the battle honours awarded to the Bengal infantry regiments which took part in the First Afghan War 1838-1842. Borris Mollo, *The Indian Army* (Dorset: 1981), p.48.



upheld the proud record of past war services in the Third Burma War 1885-87. The honour 'Burma 1885-1887' was awarded to the 5th Light Infantry for its remarkable role in the pacification of Burma and its tributary Shan states.<sup>4</sup> The regiment was unusual in that it consisted of entirely Muslim soldiers who were mostly Ranghars (Rajputs) from Delhi and from the eastern Punjab, Delhi Pathans and some Baluchis. The strength of the regiment, as given by the commandant on the 15th February 1915, the date of the outbreak of the mutiny inclusive of the civilian staff was, 870 men.<sup>5</sup> The regiment took garrison duty in the colony in 1914, about ten months before the outbreak of the disturbance.

The Mountain Battery of the Malay States Guides was an artillery unit of a regiment maintained by the Federated Malay States in fulfilment of an obligation under Clause V of the Federated Malay States 1895. The strength of this battery, which was stationed adjacent to the 5th Light Infantry at Alexandra Barracks in Singapore was fifty-four Sikhs, forty-one Punjabi Muslims and two civilian staff.<sup>6</sup>

#### PRE-MUTINY EVENTS

At the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914, Major-General Reade, then General Officer Commanding (GOC), Straits Settlements, ordered the Malay States Guides, then stationed at Taiping, to take up garrison duties in Singapore. Toward the end of August, Subedar-Major<sup>7</sup> Fateh Singh, then the most senior native officer reported to Colonel Lees, the commanding officer that the Guides were anxious to be employed in Europe. He claimed that he had consulted the views of all the Indian officers and men and they were both willing and eager to proceed on service to Europe. He was also sent to the mainland to ask for the views of the detachments at Taiping and Penang. The British officers who were asked to

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<sup>4</sup>See A.N. Barat, *The Bengal Native Infantry, Its Organization and Discipline* (Calcutta: 1962).

<sup>5</sup>Ridout to War Office, 9. 4. 1915, CO 273/435.

<sup>6</sup>Notes on the Malay States Guides, 9. 4. 1915, CO 273/435.

<sup>7</sup>Sepoy, lance-naik, havildar, havildar-major, jemedar, subedar and subedar-major were infantry ranks designated for native commissioned and non-commissioned officers in the Indian establishments. The subedar-major was the most senior native officer of the battalion and confidential adviser of the commanding officer on all matters relating to the rank and file. Similar terms were also used in some of the colonial military and police forces recruited from Indians.



advise the commandant on the matter made a gratifying report confirming that the soldiers and their native officers were keen and eager to go to the western front. This was accordingly reported to the GOC and a cable was sent to the War Office. When there was no reply for four weeks Fateh Singh went to see the commandant again urging him to consider the possibility of sending another telegram.<sup>8</sup> The offer was favourably considered by the Army Council and that the Malay States Guides would be most useful and fully employed for service in East Africa.<sup>9</sup> However, when the War Office decided to send the troopship to transport the Guides to Mombasa in December, the Indian officers and men were not happy with the offer made to them for service in East Africa. A protest letter signed by some members of the Guides was sent to General Reade complaining that Subedar-Major Fateh Singh's representation to the commanding officer was done without a prior consultation with the Indian officers and men. The latter reminded the authorities that the Guides were engaged only to serve in the peninsula and the Straits Settlements. They would not go to other countries to fight except those mentioned in the agreement sheets; and that it would bring a disastrous result if they were ordered to go to the war front. The Guides also expressed their grievances against British treatment of their brethren in the *Komagatamaru* Case.<sup>10</sup> At the same time the Indian officers of the Guides Jemadar Sher Zaman, Jemadar Vilayat Shah and Havildar Sunda were going among the men inciting them to refuse to go abroad.<sup>11</sup>

The Army Council while recognising the right of the Guides to decline to serve in Africa felt that it was undesirable to maintain troops who having volunteered for active service, subsequently changed their mind. The Council urged the Malay States Government to take steps either to amend the constitution of the corps or to substitute the men with more reliable personnel with a view to disband the battalion when situation permitted. The War Office was of the opinion that there appeared seditious tendencies in the regiment.<sup>12</sup> An inquiry revealed that the regiment was infiltrated

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<sup>8</sup> Lees to Staff Officer to Local Forces, Straits Settlements, 6. 12. 1914, CO 273/435.

<sup>9</sup> War Office to Colonial Office, 30. 11. 1914, CO 273/416.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from Men of the Malay States Guides to GOC, (n.d.) December 1914.

<sup>11</sup> Lees to Staff Officer to Local Forces, Straits Settlements, 6. 12. 1914, CO 273/435.

<sup>12</sup> War Office to Colonial Office, 12. 12. 1914, CO 273/416.



by subversive elements. Seditious agents who were interned by the authorities managed to influence the guards into believing about the atrocities at the war front. Indian soldiers suffered heavily during the early campaigns of the European War. Some of the Guides were said to have been meeting aliens who had been spreading seditious rumours. The commanding officer also claimed that seditious literatures were sent from America to his men through the post. All these seemed to prepare the ground for more sinister influences to take root. There was desertions in the Malay States Guides because of the fear of being sent to the war front.<sup>13</sup> The men were apparently discontented. The authorities were concerned with the danger of this spirit of discontentment among the guides spreading to the 5th Light Infantry. The Guides were at once sent back to its cantonment in Perak. The Mountain Battery, an artillery unit under Captain Maclean was retained and attached to the 5th Light Infantry. When the train transporting the Guides arrived at Ipoh, hundreds of local Sikhs who were assembled on the platform, greeted the sepoys with cheers and applause. It seemed as if the Guides were being welcomed home after a victory.

During the War seditious movement was at its height. The Revolutionary Society, the *Maniktolla* Secret Society and the Gadr Party were among the anti-British organizations that sent agents to Malaya. At the early stage of the War these organizations were joining hands with each other, acting in collaboration with German agents who financed their activities. The objective was to ferment trouble in the colonies, so that the energies of the British would be engaged in that direction. Simultaneously, a revolt in India was to be raised. Thus the British in India would be left without outside help. The preliminary preparations in connection with these plans were to be left to the Indian leaders, the Germans would only appear on the scene at the right moment when all was ready. The Germans would lead the men into the actual fighting with the help of the Indian revolutionaries.<sup>14</sup> It was set 19th February 1915 as the day on which mutinies among Indian forces should break out with seizures of the great arsenals at Lahore and Ferozepore, and also massacres of British army officers, administrators and civilians.

Although there was no organised sedition in either Singapore or the mainland, there was no doubt that Singapore from its

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<sup>13</sup> Report on the Malay States Guides by Lieutenant-Colonel C.B.H. Lees, 6. 12. 1914.

<sup>14</sup> Notes on the Testimony by Sukumar Chatterji s/o Radendranath Chatterji, n.d., CO 273/435.



geographical position, was the stopping place of many rank seditionists, whose names were brought to light during the trials in India. Diehn was one of the principal agents who formented trouble among the Indians. He was a leader in the scheme for introducing arms into India for a revolution there. Singapore became a depository both before and during the war for seditious literature. In October 1914, seditionists on their way back to India found that the Sepoys in Singapore were affected by seditionist activities. This fact was concluded from evidences given in the Lahore Trials. It was also reported by the GOC that the commandant of the 5th Light Infantry did call the attention of the police to certain undesirable Indian natives who stayed just opposite the entrance at Alexandra Barracks. These men were removed. Following the refusal of the Malay States Guides to go to East Africa in December Indian agents were sent to Singapore by the Government of India to probe the state of native (Indians) feeling in Singapore.<sup>15</sup>

## THE MUTINY

On the 15th February, 1915, the men of the 5th Light Infantry and the Mountain Battery of the Malay States Guides who were quartered at Alexandra Barracks mutinied.<sup>16</sup> The new GOC, Brigadier-General Ridout inspected a parade mounted by the 5th Light Infantry at 8am on the morning of the 15th prior to the battalion's embarkation for Hong Kong on the 17th to replace the 40th Pathans who were moving north to garrison one of the China treaty ports. He addressed the battalion in words approved by the commanding officer. There was a significant murmur after the GOC's address, but none of the British officers took notice. Shortly after three o'clock in the afternoon, whilst ammunition was being loaded during the return of ordnance, a shot was fired at the guard room by sepoy Ismail Khan, a young Rajput, and this led to an alarm being sounded by the bugler. This was later taken as the signal which set the men of the Right Wing on their road to mutiny. The state of alarm spread rapidly. Soldiers of the Right Wing grabbed weapons and ammunitions from the stores while men of the Left

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<sup>15</sup> Reports of the Inquiry by Brigadier Ridout 26. 8. 1915, CO 273/435.

<sup>16</sup> Stories on the events after the outbreak of the mutiny have been narrated at length by previous writers. See R.W.E. Harper & H. Miller, *Singapore Mutiny* (Singapore: 1984); B. Roland, *The Lights of Singapore* (London: 1934); 'A Lady's Experiences in the Singapore Mutiny', *Blackwood's Magazine*, vol. CXCVIII, number MCCII, London: 1915.



Wing ran into hiding. The British officers were taken by surprise and sought help from the Malay States Volunteer Rifles Corps,<sup>17</sup> who were camped in the adjacent ground. A party of mutineers had proceeded to Tanglin Barracks where they attacked the military hospital, murdered the officers and several of the guards and opened the gate of the German prisoners of war camp, offering arms to them; seventeen of the German prisoners escaped. Other mutineers proceeded toward the town from Alexandra, murdering officers in plain clothes and European civilians. The casualties, both at Tanglin and elsewhere were reported to be heavy as there were few regular soldiers available to put down the insurrection. Furthermore, Singapore had been ill-prepared to meet any serious local contingency.

Governor Young, as Commander-in-Chief of the colony at once proclaimed martial law. The European population were rescued to safe centres, to ships and hotels within the town. All armed personnel were mobilised including men of the Royal Garrison Artillery, and naval personnel from the Royal Navy HMS *Cadmus*. The Johore Military Force which was placed at the disposal of the GOC since the outbreak of the European War also helped in the suppression of the mutiny.<sup>18</sup> The Governor also ordered the internment of aliens in Singapore as well as in the Malay states. The Malay States Guides was confined to the barracks at Taiping. On the night of the 15th, the mutineers took control of Tanglin Barrack, Alexandra and beseiging the commanding officer in his residence. The latter was being defended by men of the Malay States Volunteer Rifles Corps. The mutineers, some from the Light Infantry and some from the Mountain Battery, tried to get into the town but the steps taken at the outset prevented any serious penetration. The mutineers having failed in their objective on the town, separated into parties and dispersed themselves all over the Island while endeavouring to reach the mainland.

The mutiny went on for a few weeks. Besides the arrival of the 4th Battalion Shropshire Light Infantry, there were many

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<sup>17</sup>The Malay States Volunteer Rifles was raised among European civilians residing in the Malay states in 1902. For further reading on this volunteer corps see N. Haron, 'The Raising of Volunteer Corps in Malaya 1850-1925', *Sumbangsih* (Kuala Lumpur: 1988).

<sup>18</sup>The Johore Military Forces (JMF) was a regular unit of Malaya raised by the Sultan of Johore. The strength as of 1915 was about 400 men trained by a British officer. However, in most calculations of military strength of Malaya the JMF was not taken into account as it was merely considered as a body of palace guards-performing ceremonial functions and constabulary duties.



responses for the distress call from various foreign navies. The French warship *Montcalm* brought 118 French naval men. The Japanese warships *Tsushima* and *Otawa* landed more than a hundred men and officers on the Island. The Russians Navy also sent a hundred armed men ashore.<sup>19</sup> By the 22nd February, the situation was under control. The mutineers were reported to be hiding by day and appearing to reach for provisions by night. Fifty-two of the mutineers were killed or were seriously wounded. 637 out of the 818 men of the 5th Light Infantry and eighty of the Mountain Battery were either captured or surrendered.<sup>20</sup> By the 4th of March, the situation as a whole remained satisfactory. Only forty-nine of the 800 Light Infantry and two of the ninety-seven Malay States Guides men were still at large. Of the seventeen escaping German prisoners six were recaptured, while others were reported to be in Sumatra.<sup>21</sup>

Among the European servicemen killed were the commander of the Mountain Battery; three officers and two non-commissioned officers of the Royal Garrison Artillery; two officers of the 5th Light Infantry; two officers and one private from the Malay States Volunteer Rifles; the British officer of the Johore Military Force; the medical officer, four NCOs and four privates of the Singapore Volunteer Corps; three non-commissioned officers of HMS *Cadmus*; a non-commissioned officer of the Royal Army Service Corps; and one from the Singapore Volunteer Artillery. Nine other European servicemen were critically wounded including two Russian sailors. These exclude sixteen European civilians who were killed by the mutineers. Among the Asians killed were an officer and a private servicemen of the Johor Military Force; and five civilians namely two Malays and three Chinese. A German prisoner of war was also killed in the cross-fire<sup>22</sup>. The casualties could have been far greater had the mutineers been ready with some definite plan of attack on the British community at the beginning of the outbreak. It could also last much longer had there been a proper leadership.

In all previous mutinies of the Indian regiments, with the exception of the Great Mutiny of 1857-1861, mutinies were confined within the regiments only, few had attacked British civilians. In Singapore the scene of the Great Mutiny partially repeated itself.

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<sup>19</sup>Telegram Ridout to War Office, 18. 2. 1915, CO 273/435.

<sup>20</sup>Telegram Ridout to War Office, 22. 2. 1915, CO 273/435.

<sup>21</sup>Telegram Ridout to War Office, 4. 3. 1915, CO 273/435.

<sup>22</sup>Telegram Ridout to War Office, 9. 4. 1915, CO 273/435.



The mutineers massacred both British sevicemen and civilians. If not for the quick action taken to protect European civilian lives, the casualties among British civilians could have been much higher. This infuriated the authorities who responded with great ferocity, showing little mercy to mutineers who fell into their hands. Mutineers who surrendered or were captured were court-martialled for mutiny and shooting with intent to kill. They were not, as alleged, tried for refusal to go to fight Turkey. The majority of those tried were sentenced to death by shooting or hanging. Some were banished for life to serve their sentence in the penal colony at Andaman Islands, while others received the sentence of hard labour, for some as long as twenty years.

Like most of the colonial regiments whose loyalty became questionable, the Malay States Guides and the 5th Light Infantry soon faced the fate of disbandment. However, the European War delayed the disbandment. It was thought that the time was inappropriate on the one hand, while on the other it was agreed that they might be of use to the British war effort. The Malay States Guides and the remnants of the 5th Light Infantry, seven British and native officers and five hundred other ranks, all sailed westwards in 1915 to Aden. However, the 5th Light Infantry proceeded to West Africa fighting the Germans and then to Aden fighting the Turks. Finally came the disbandment. The Malay States Guides was disbanded in 1919 when it was still in Aden, followed by the 5th Light Infantry in 1922.

### THE CLASSIC INGREDIENTS

To determine whether the mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry had the classic ingredients of mutinies in the Indian regiments, it is necessary to review the causes of the mutiny of some of the Bengal regiments in 1857. In the case of the 1857 mutiny, the causes were, on the whole, deep-rooted and of long standing; at the same time a situation was allowed to develop whereby a small and apparently trivial spark could set of a conflagration. The introduction of British laws and reforms; and the abolition of local practices such as Suttee and Thuggee sanctified by Hindu custom, had caused a political unrest among the Indians in general, and among the sepoys of the Bengal Army in particular. The army was weakened by the drain of British officers to the political and civil services then expanding in order to cope with the administration of new territories. More often than not, the transfer of the younger and more active officers would leave the regiments under the command of the elderly and the disinterested



officers. Morale suffered accordingly. There was a general dissatisfaction among the sepoys because their conditions of service had been affected after the completion of the British pacification of India. Although a regiment normally served within its own presidency, the sepoys were prepared to serve elsewhere during hostilities, particularly when they were awarded with a compensation for field service. However, the native soldiers were less happy about continuing to serve elsewhere after the end of hostilities on garrison duties, particularly where a new territory had been annexed and they no longer qualified for field service pay. Furthermore, in 1856, all recruits had to accept a commitment for overseas service and many had religious objections to crossing the sea. Against this tense background, a new muzzle-loading Enfield rifle was issued. Drill required the end of the cartridge to be bitten off before loading, and rumours were ripe that these cartridges were greased with the fat of pig (unclean to the Moslems) and the fat of cow (holy to the Hindus). This led further to the rumours that the British planned to pollute and then Christianise the whole sepoy army. In May 1857, sepoys at Meerut refused to touch the Enfield cartridges and they were court-martialled and imprisoned. Their fellow sepoys mutinied, broke into the prison and released them. This signalled the escalation of the mutiny.<sup>23</sup> Like most of the previous mutinies, there were thus elements of ineffective officers, a general political unease and a direct military grievance as immediate causes.

Similar pattern existed in the 5th Light Infantry in the months leading up to the mutiny. There was a general discontent over conditions of service; there were also grievances, frictions on the one hand between British officers and the commanding officer, and on the other between factions of native commissioned and non-commissioned officers; finally there was a serious misunderstanding over the regiment's active service destination. The decline of discipline in the regiment could largely be attributed to the ineffectiveness of the commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Victor Martin who assumed command in 1913. Martin had been commissioned into the former Royal Dublin Fusiliers in November 1887. He joined the Indian Army in 1890, and was later transferred to the 5th in 1905. He had been a major in the battalion, commanding one of the double companies. It was reported that as a major he had been extremely unpopular and commanded no respect from his officers and exerted no real authority.<sup>24</sup> The previous com-

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<sup>23</sup>See J.W. Kaye, *History of the Sepoy War*.

<sup>24</sup>Reports of the Inquiry by Brigadier Ridout, 26. 8. 1915, CO 273/435.



manding officer, Colonel Barratt had officially expressed doubt as to his fitness for command, reporting that he was unpopular with his brother officers and that he inspired little respect among the men. Martin was sent away from the battalion to be under the eye of the GOC, then Major-General Reade. After three months absence it was known that he was to be promoted as the new battalion commander. After this it would surely have been wise to give him the chance to start afresh elsewhere, but he was sent back to command the 5th. When assuming the commanding post he never made any effort to gain the confidence and respect of the British officers of the regiment. There were rows which had occurred between Martin and the other Double Company officers prior to his promotion, and dishonest continued after his promotion. It appeared that the knowledge of this was common property in the regiment. In regard to the attitude of the commanding officer toward his officers he thought some of his brother-officers had entered into a cabal to keep him out of command and let this be known. He slighted British officers in the presence of the men, while at least three British officers had openly showed their contempt and dislike for him, a feeling the others managed to conceal. Lieutenant Strover had been a good adjutant to Colonel Barratt, but it was apparent from the onset that there was an absence sympathy between Colonel Martin and his adjutant. It was also a common knowledge within the regiment that the commanding officer did not trust his adjutant.

Prior to the tragedy, Colonel Martin rarely spoke to his officers officially but made his second-in-command Major William Cotton the channel of communication. Then, to the officers the only way to approach their commanding officer was through the second-in-command. This led to the discussions among groups of officers as to what line to take from time to time. The lack of confidence in the commanding officer was the root of all the troubles. On the commanding officer's side, the feeling that the officers were not in sympathy with him led him to take a distorted view of their actions, as well as induced him to take the regrettable position of prisoners' friend.

The GOC in his report to the War Office stated that Lieutenant-Colonel Martin did stultify his British officers before the Indian rank and file.<sup>25</sup> The officers felt their position helpless, this feel-

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<sup>25</sup>Statements of officers in The Report of Inquiry reflected the continuing controversy between Martin and his fellow officers. Almost all put the blame entirely on their commanding officer. Martin stood in remote isolation from his officers, several of whom had almost calculatingly in their evidence to the court,



ing gave rise to a regrettable contumacy, a state of affairs which could not escape the notice on the Indian officers and men. In these circumstances, factions and intrigues became common among the Indian officers. This centered on the expected promotion to commissioned rank of a certain ambitious colour-havildar. The vacancy was created by the recent death of the previous holder, a Pathan. His clan naturally expected that his successor would come from one among them. However, a contender was Havildar Imtiaz Ali, a long-serving Rajput who had been recommended for promotion by both Lieutenant-Colonel Martin and his predecessor. The whole battalion was divided on the issue. When the promotion of Imtiaz Ali was not approved by the Government of India, who favoured instead the promotion of a Pathan, the Rajput faction of the battalion was left bitter and disappointed.

As a result, the firm and rigid discipline could not be maintained. The regiment was under a weak commanding officer in whom the British officer corps had no confidence and to whom the Indian officers showed no respect. In addition, the Indian officers themselves had their own factions which quarrelled uneasily with each other.

There were other causes of discontent among the men of the regiment. The Indian soldiers did not take to the life in Singapore. They found it difficult to save their salaries for families in India. As a garrison duty unit, they were not qualified for field service pay. They received inadequate official food rations i.e. milk and goat meat due to the difficulty of obtaining sufficient supply. They were thus forced to supplement their rations with their own purchase of meat and milk. It was then that they realised that they had to live on a dollar, instead of a rupee, standard of living.

The men were also unhappy with their garrison duties. They had to take heavy extra duties after the departure of the Malay States Guides. The 5th had to take on the extra burden of posts and duties previously carried out by the Guides. The duties were not only demanding but also called for longer hours on posts because of the difficulties of finding reliefs. These extra duties were not compensated by extra allowance.

One of the main responsibilities of the commandant of a colonial battalion was to enforce insulation on his native officers

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put the blame on him for the failure to ensure a high state of discipline in his regiment. Indeed, not one British officer had offered a good word for him. Report of a Court of Inquiry into the Mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry in Singapore, 11. 5. 1915, Simla Government Central Branch Press, India Office Library, London.



and men against nationalist or seditious elements. However, the British officers found difficulties to insulate the battalion. Guards and other duties in Singapore had so spread out the battalion in innumerable detachments, at times as many as five hundreds and fifty men were out of barracks. The dispersion had lent itself to the sepoys being subjected to the evil influences of seditionists who were passing to the Far East and America. There were reports of alien interference with the Indian soldiers. Roland Braddell who was the chief prosecutor at the court martial of the mutineers in his book *The Lights of Singapore* stated that the uprising was engineered from India, and the main channel of communication was an Indian merchant who had a house and garden near Alexandra Barracks and who had been regularly visited by the Indian officers of the 5th Light Infantry.<sup>26</sup>

As the soldiers were all Muslims, they were understandably under some pressure when Turkey entered the War. There was for example a mosque near by, where some men of the battalion went on Fridays, and where a Maulavi regularly preached that Turkey was the seat of the Khalifa of Islam and no Muslim should fight against Turkey. There was also a German prisoners of war camp where the men acted as sentries; the prisoners managed to communicate with the sentries and convinced them that Germany was winning and Britain was suffering repeated defeats. The fact that these men seemed to have believed that the Germans were Muslims, no doubt confused further the Turkey issue. Two of the Indian officers were reported to have spread pro-Turkish stories, however, no action was taken by the commanding officer.<sup>27</sup>

Things came to a head through a total lack of understanding between officers and men. It was known that the battalion would soon be on their assignment; orders were expected daily. The officers hoped that they would go to Mesopotamia and fight the Turks so that their differences within the battalion would then disappear and that the regiment would have a chance to distinguish

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<sup>26</sup>This man was identified as Kassim Ali Mansoor. He faced a field general court martial in the Supreme Court. He pleaded not guilty to nine charges of treason and two other charges of treacherously giving intelligence to the enemy and of attempting to wage war against the British. The court found that it was impossible to dissociate Mansoor's actions from the mutiny. He was found guilty of treason by despatching a letter to the Turkish Consul in Rangoon asking for a warship, and of attempting to wage war on Britain and was hanged on 31. 5. 1915, *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.* Also mentioned in Reports of Inquiry by Brigadier Ridout, 26.8.1915, CO 273/435.



itself. They confidently assumed that the men felt the same. At last orders came; they were to sail almost at once, but for Hong Kong, at which the officers were bitterly disappointed. The new assignment of duty was announced to the men by the GOC Brigadier Ridout at a farewell parade. He praised them for their past services and gave them his good wishes but entirely failed to tell the Indian officers and men where they were going.

The GOC's address heightened the feeling of uncertainty among the Indian officers and men as to their destination. In fact, the destination was not disclosed to the Indians because the GOC was assured by his agent and the British officers of the regiment that the soldiers were staunch and would go anywhere.<sup>28</sup> Colonel Martin, the commanding officer, also gave the GOC the impression that the men were disappointed at not being able to go on active service. However, the real situation was that a large number of the Moslem soldiers who were influenced by the seditionists were not prepared to go and fight a war with Turkey. As Moslems they believed that they should not fight with another Moslem nation unnecessarily. On the night of the 14th, the agent brought some unsatisfactory news about the 5th Light Infantry, chiefly focussing on the uneasiness against Turkey.<sup>29</sup> But this was not reported to the GOC who inspected the regiment the following morning.

With the impression that the men were too eager to go to the front, the GOC therefore purposely did not disclose the real destination. In his complementary address which was translated into Hindustani by the commanding officer, he reminded the soldiers that though it was not their good fortune to go to Europe, it was a duty of the soldiers to go where they were ordered, regardless of their personal feeling were. The GOC added that he hoped it might soon be their luck to go to Europe.<sup>30</sup> The men were in doubt as to their actual destination; some thought that they had been deceived, and were in fact certain that the regiment was not sailing eastward but to the west to fight a war with Turkey. The impression given by the GOC that the regiment was destined to fight a war with Turkey caused the men to express their anger. Immediately after the parade two men requested to have their names struck off.<sup>31</sup> They came to a conclusion that they were destined to sail westward

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<sup>28</sup> Reports of the Inquiry by Brigadier Ridout, 26. 8. 1915, CO 273/435.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Regimental Order No. 100, 15. 2. 1915.

<sup>31</sup> Ridout to War Office, 25. 2. 1915, CO 273/435.



to fight the Turks and it was a religious duty for a Moslem not to fight another Moslem. Thus a small trivial spark caused the already restless soldiers to mutiny.<sup>32</sup>

The mutiny at Singapore had thus all the classical ingredients. The regiment had been unfortunate to have ineffective commanding officer. It was a tradition in all Indian regiments to rely heavily on the subedars and jemadars, the Viceroy's Commissioned Officers, and this tradition worked well if the commanding officer was of high quality, and had the full support of all the European officer corps in the battalion. In the case of the 5th Light Infantry, the commanding officer was ineffective; there was no *esprit de corps* in the British officer corps. The British officers were for all intents and purposes divided into two hostile camps; on the one side, the commanding officer, rather feebly supported by the second-in-command; on the other the adjutant and two other officers who formed a solid clique against the commanding officer; meanwhile the remaining officers steered a more or less middle course.<sup>33</sup> There were factions in the Indian officer corps and each clique had its own following among the rank and file. Thus the battalion suffered, discipline and morale became weak. There was disruptive influence from outside where the British officers failed to insulate their Indian soldiers from fanatical and seditious elements. There had been military grievances over promotion, service condition as garrison unit, the high cost of living experienced by the soldiers in Singapore and lastly over the problem of the new assignment. Such ingredients were also found in the mutiny of the Garhwalis Battalion at Peshawar in 1930 and the mutiny of Sikh squadron of the Central India Horse at Bombay in 1940.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Ridout was to say later that had he had any inkling of the restlessness of the sepoys because of the supposed uncertainty of their destination, he would have made it quite plain that it was eastward they were to go. Ridout to War Office, 3. 3. 1915, CO 273/435.

<sup>33</sup>Report of a Court of Inquiry Into the Mutiny of the 5th Light Infantry.

<sup>34</sup>The Central Indian Horse had all the three ingredients. Sikhs were the most inflammable of all the peoples of India after the First World War. The soldiers had been in contact with the *Kirti Lehar* Movement. The regiment also had two successive inefficient commanding officers. The case of the Garhwalis battalion had only two of the classical ingredients. The men had no confidence on their new commanding officer, and a personal military grievance of a subedar who later engineered the mutiny. For further reading on these two mutinies see Phillip Mason, *A Matter of Honour*, pp. 451-53 and 513-14.