

# The Imperial Service Troops and Indian States Forces (Part II)

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In May 1939, with the threat of war looming ever larger, a committee set up by the Government of India decided to make good more than three years deficiencies in arms and equipment to the States Forces. The committee also decided to refund money expended by States on the purchase of arms but at the same time it was decided to discontinue the 1920 scheme and introduce a new 1939 scheme. The main objectives of this new scheme, which came into effect on 1 December 1939, were :-

- (a) To give States certain concessions in the matter of arms and equipment without necessarily incurring a government liability in this respect.
- (b) To insist on adequate standards of efficiency in units.
- (c) To re-designate the three categories of units.
- (d) To exclude certain minor units of no significant military value from the scheme. For instance, the smallest State cavalry unit allowed was of squadron strength. Bodyguard cavalry units of less than one squadron were therefore transferred to the category of irregular troops.

The categorisation changes were:

1920 Scheme	1939 Scheme	Role
Class A (earmarked)	Field Service Units (FSU)	Units which rulers undertook to place at the disposal of the Crown in an emergency
Class A (non-earmarked)	General Service Units (GSU)	Units which may be offered for service
Class B	State Service Units (SSU)	Units whose primary role was internal security of the State

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Certain conditions were applied to the allocation of units to the three new categories. FSUs had to be of complete battalion strength and conform to adequate standards of efficiency. GSUs had to approximate closely to FSUs while SSUs had to be no smaller than a squadron of cavalry or a company of infantry and had to maintain a high standard of efficiency. FSUs were granted a free initial issue of arms and associated equipment plus replacement and repair of arms. GSUs and SSUs were issued with arms and equipment at cost price.

A Crown representative had the right to accept or refuse a State into the scheme and to veto the raising of new units. At the same time he could transfer a unit from one category to another or withdraw it from the scheme altogether.

Further concessions of the 1939 scheme included the free distribution of large numbers of horses from Indian Cavalry regiments, the opening of Kitchener College, Nowgong, and Staff College, Quetta, to personnel of the State Forces, and, later in the war, the allocation of vacancies at various schools which had been established for training officers for the war, such as the Officers Training Schools at Mhow and Belgaum, and the Junior Commanders Course at Poona.

The original announcement of the 1939 scheme was made to the States in early August 1939 and they were asked to signify their acceptance within two months. By November 1939 thirty three States had accepted the new scheme and in the end only Bhopal, Cutch, Dholpur, Dhar and Rewa did not join it. Under a rather complicated formula these States did, however, receive an initial free issue of arms as laid down under the original 1920 scheme.

As with the First World War, so with the commencement of the Second World War virtually all the rulers offered their State Forces for employment and forty units were incorporated into the Indian State Forces (ISF) order of battle. Within a very short time twenty of the units were employed outside of their State territories and by the end of the war State Forces had served with distinction



in every theatre of operation, with a total strength of 50,290. Again, as with the First World War, several State units were combined to form composite units for the duration of the war. For instance, a composite ISF Demonstration Company for the infantry schools at Saugor was formed from one platoon each from Alwar, Bikaner, Udaipur and Jaipur. The unit assembled at Jaipur in April 1943 and moved to Saugor the following month. Similarly, an ISF Central Sappers and Miners Training Battalion was formed at Roorkee in April 1943 by amalgamating the existing State training units from Malerkotla, Mandi, Faridkot, Sirmur, Tehri Garhwal and Suket. Others were:

34th Indian States Forces Brigade – East Africa.

150th Infantry Brigade – jungle training and later Hong Kong.

Force 281 – recapture of Dodecanese Islands, Eastern Mediterranean.

Indore/Rewa Mule Company.

ISF Wing, Armoured Car School, Ferozepore.

ISF Training Battery, Mountain Artillery Training Centre, Ambala, Royal Indian Artillery (RIA).

ISF Wing, Training Field Regiment, Chhindwara, RIA.

ISF Training Unit, 39th Indian Division (Training).

ISF Officers' Cadet School, Indore.

Western India Circle Training School, Baroda.

The States Forces, as with other elements of the Indian Army, faced additional difficulties in Malaya and Burma with conflicting calls upon their loyalty. Some joined the INA; others such as Lieutenant Colonel Gurbaksh Singh, DSO, OBE, second in command of the Jind Infantry, provided a powerful example of resisting the Japanese. After the war he became Commanding Officer of the unit. His DSO and OBE were awarded for war service. The ISF officer to receive the highest decoration among State Forces personnel for war service, Captain MK Durrani of the Bahawalpur Infantry, was awarded the George Cross for his part



in countering the efforts of the Japanese. He was tortured by them for many days but refused to divulge the information they wanted.

As the war came to an end so the States Forces units began to return to their home States. Some were diverted to deal with a different sort of invasion, locusts, while others were sent to Hong Kong to form part of 150 Indian Infantry Brigade, which drew its entire infantry complement from States Forces.

Again, as with the First World War, so the onset of the Second World War led to a realisation that India's contribution to the war effort would be greatly expanded. Active Indian Army units were made available for front line duties and replaced by specially raised garrison battalions and companies to take over guard duties at the various military and civil centres that were considered to be at risk. Transport companies were in short supply, particularly in the Middle East where convoys of supplies to Russia were being organised. As the tempo of war increased the States were asked to provide assistance by helping to raise such units for the Indian Army from within the States. This policy enabled the smaller States Forces to make a positive contribution to the war effort where otherwise their size and resources might have excluded them from active service.

In addition, a number of Indian States Forces units, such as the Kashmir artillery units, and the infantry companies of Baria and Dhrangadhra, were integrated into the Indian Army. Other States, such as Ratlam and Bhavnagar, contributed by transferring trained men from their existing Indian States Forces units.

The units raised were:

Royal Indian Artillery

30th (Jammu) Mountain Battery.

31st (Jammu) Mountain Battery.

Jammu Wing, Mountain Artillery Training Centre.



## Infantry

- 2nd (Baria) Infantry Company, Ajmere Regiment.
- 55th (Jind) Infantry Company, 15th Punjab Regiment.
- 76th (Jind) Infantry Company, 15th Punjab Regiment.
- 90th (Dhrangadhra) Infantry Company, Rajput Regiment.
- 92nd (Jind) Infantry Company, 15th Punjab Regiment.
- 414th (Bahawalpur) Infantry Company,  
14th Punjab Regiment.
- 614th (Bahawalpur) Infantry Company,  
14th Punjab Regiment.
- 711th (Kapurthala) Infantry Company, Sikh Regiment.
- 811th (Kapurthala) Infantry Company, Sikh Regiment.

## Garrison

- 1st (Malwa) Garrison Company, Ajmere Regiment.
- 1st (Tripura) Garrison Company, Assam Regiment.
- 62nd (Indore) Garrison Company.
- 204th (Indore) Garrison Company, Grenadiers.
- 306th (Alwar) Garrison Company, Rajputana Rifles.
- 311th (Nabha) Garrison Company, Sikh Regiment.
- 318th (Tehri-Garhwal) Garrison Company,  
Royal Garhwal Rifles.
- 406th (Jaipur) Garrison Company, Rajputana Rifles.
- 411th (Faridkot) Garrison Company, Sikh Regiment.
- 506th (Bharatpur) Garrison Company, Rajputana Rifles.
- 511th (Patiala) Garrison Company, Sikh Regiment.
- 611th (Nabha and Faridkot) Garrison Company,  
Sikh Regiment.
- 619th (Hyderabad) Garrison Company,  
Kumaon Regiment.
- 27th (Jind) Battalion, 15th Punjab Regiment.



### Sappers and Miners

- 7th (Kapurthala) Pioneer Company.
- 94th (Faridkot) Field Company.
- 95th (Mandi) Field Company.
- 1209th (Tehri) Auxiliary Pioneer Company.

### Royal Indian Army Service Corps

- 7th (Bahawalpur) Motor Ambulance Section.
- 49th (Bikanir) General Purposes Transport Company.
- 50th (Kolhapur) General Purposes Transport Company.
- 51st (Mysore) General Purposes Transport Company.
- 52nd (Bhopal) General Purposes Transport Company.
- 53rd (Travancore) General Purposes Transport Company.
- 54th (Jodhpur) General Purposes Transport Company.
- 55th (Hyderabad) General Purposes Transport Company.
- 56th (Patiala) General Purposes Transport Company.
- 57th (Baroda and Kathiawar) General Purposes Transport Company.
- 58th (Central India) General Purposes Transport Company.
- 59th (Rajputana) General Purposes Transport Company.
- 81st (Faridkot) Animal Transport Company.

### Indian Signal Corps

- 75th (Jammu and Kashmir) Infantry Brigade Signal Section.
- 89th (Indian States Forces) Infantry Brigade Signal Section.

### Indian Army Medical Corps

- Dewas (Senior) Medical Section.
- 20th (Bhopal) Field Ambulance.



At the end of the war all units were disbanded, the men being absorbed back into the ISF or discharged. The contribution made by the States equated to almost six battalions of infantry, four engineering companies and 12 transport companies, in addition to recruits provided as individuals for the Indian Army. Additionally, many non-combatants were enrolled from the States and, in the Second World War, large numbers were sent to the Burma Front.

Before we move to the concluding phase of this account, a brief look at some statistics as they relate to First and Second World War activities:

Units in Active Operations	1914/18	1939/45
Cavalry regiments	10	2
Field batteries	-	2
Mountain batteries	1	2
Field companies of sappers	4	5
Bridging platoons	-	1
Infantry battalions	12	7
Pony companies	4	2
Total strengths	18,440	50,290

### Casualties

	Killed in Action		Died of Wounds		Wounded		Missing	
	1914/18	1939/45	1914/18	1939/45	14/18	39/45	14/18	39/45
Seconded Officers	18	14	-	5	47	14	-	-
Indian Officers	25	13	3	3	50	26	-	4
Indian soldiers	556	330	142	103	959	659	2	13



Honours and Awards	1914/18	1939/45
George Cross (GC)	-	1
Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (KBE)	1	-
Companion of the Most Eminent Order of the Indian Empire (CIE)	9	5
Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE)	-	1
Companion of the Distinguished Service Order (DSO)	1	6
Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE)	5	12
Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE)	-	35
Military Cross (MC)	14	31
Indian Distinguished Service Medal (IDSM)	171	25
Indian Meritorious Service Medal (IMSM)	307	-
Indian Order of Merit (IOM)	41	6
Military Medal (MM)	-	48
Order of British India (OBI) 1st Class	28	22
Order of British India (OBI) 2nd Class	70	7
British Empire Medal (BEM)	-	4
Mention in Despatches (MID)	314	7
Foreign decorations	42	1



And so we reach the concluding period of the history of the Imperial Service Troops (IST)/ISF. On 3 June 1947 Lord Mountbatten announced the British plan to relinquish power to India and Pakistan. A States Department was established with two Secretaries in charge, one from Congress and one from the Muslim League, and eventually Instruments of Accession were drawn up for those States remaining within India. A common Standstill Agreement was also drawn up, specifying that administrative arrangements of common concern currently existing between the Crown and the States would continue until new arrangements could be made. The 'defence' aspect of the Instruments of Accession did not, however, include the Indian States Forces. At the time of partition there were in excess of 75,000 all ranks in the ISF and their future soon began to receive consideration, especially within India which inherited the vast majority of them. In 1949 preliminary agreements were reached on the integration of the States Forces. The first of these was reached on 7 April followed, on 26-27 July, by a meeting of the Rajpramukhs of the Unions, the Premiers of the Travancore-Cochin Union and of Mysore, and Indian Government officials. Meanwhile, as announced on 24 June, the forces of eleven merged States, including Baroda, Kolhapur and Rajpipla, a total of 5,000 men, had already been integrated with those of the Indian Army.

States which had either merged into neighbouring provinces, or whose administration was taken over by the central government, were fairly easy to deal with since they had transferred their full powers to the Government of India. Even so, the Indian Army could only absorb so many ISF personnel. Some of the units were unsuitable for incorporation into the Indian Army while some of the soldiers did not wish it. But there were dangers in demobilising so many men at once so, after Independence, the Government of India allowed the States Forces to remain in their original locations and on the same terms of service that they had previously enjoyed. Gradually those unfit or unwilling to merge into the Indian Army were mustered out.

Hyderabad, which had refused to accede on Independence, maintained the largest number of States Forces. Civil unrest grew in the first year of independence, negotiations with India broke



down and finally the Government of India took control of the administration of the State through a military operation, Operation POLO, which began on 13 September 1948 and ended four days later. The State Forces of Hyderabad put up some stiff resistance at the start of the operation but soon crumbled in the face of the overwhelming superiority of the Indian Army. Following the action their numbers were progressively reduced and reorganized and, on 1 April 1950, they were brought under the complete control of the Indian Army.

Also on 1 April 1950 the Government of India took over control of the States Forces of the Travancore-Cochin Union and of Mysore, responsibility for which had passed after independence from the rulers to the relevant State ministries.

In the case of Unions other than Travancore-Cochin the problems faced were rather more difficult. The Rajpramukh of each Union was authorised to raise, maintain and administer the States Forces, subject to Government or Presidential decree, the Forces to be paid for from Union revenues. It was decided to implement integration of these troops on a gradual basis but in the meantime they were to be subject to a number of controls. These were:

- (a) The Forces be commanded by an Indian Army officer on loan.
- (b) Their strength and organisation be fixed with reference to their perceived role.
- (c) They should be reorganised on Indian Army lines.
- (d) Officer selection and promotion would mirror that of the Indian Army.
- (e) Officers could be interchanged between the States Forces and the Indian Army.

In the event, financial considerations meant that the arrangements had to be curtailed. After further discussion, all States Forces were completely taken over by the Government of India and elements became a part of the Indian Army with effect from 1 April 1951.



**INDIAN ARMY****Current Title****Cavalry**

Gwalior Lancers	}	
1st Gwalior Lancers	}	
2nd Gwalior Lancers	}	
Jodhpur/Kacchawa Horse	}	
Jaipur Kachhawa Horse	}	
Jaipur Rajendra Hazari Guards	}	
Jodhpur Lancers	}	
Bikaner Dungar Lancers	}	61 Cavalry
Alwar Mangal Lancers	}	
Udaipur Mewar Lancers	}	
Mysore Lancers	}	
'B' Squadron, 2nd Patiala Lancers	}	
Saurashtra Horsed Cavalry Squadron	}	
Nawanagar Shri Huzur Body Guard	}	
Jammu & Kashmir Body Guard Cavalry	}	(4 officers and cobbler only)
Gwalior Mounted Band	}	(from May 1954)

Jodhpur, Gwalior & Mysore  
Cavalry Training Troops

Cavalry Training Troop,  
RVFC Centre

Indore Mounted Escort

Mounted Police, Madhya  
Pradesh Special Armed Force

Jammu and Kashmir Body Guard

60th Heavy Regiment, Artillery

Jodhpur Lancers

D Squadron, 7th Light Cavalry

**Artillery**

Bikaner Bijey Battery

83rd (Bikaner) Field Battery

Gwalior Scindia's Field Battery

84th (Scindia) Field Battery

Gwalior Mountain Battery

74th (Gwalior) Mountain Battery



Jammu and Kashmir  
Mountain Battery

76th (Jammu and Kashmir)  
Mountain Battery

Patiala Mountain Battery

75th (Patiala) Mountain Battery

Patiala Field Battery

85th (Patiala) Field Battery

## Engineers

All of the units listed below are part of the Bengal Engineer Group :

1st Faridkot Field Company

368th Field Company (Faridkot)

2nd Faridkot Field Company

94th Field Company (Faridkot)

Malerkotla Field Company

369th Field Company  
(Malerkotla)

Mandi Field Company

95th Field Company (Mandi)

Sirmoor Field Company

100th Field Company (Sirmoor)

Tehri Garhwal Field Company

84th Field Company  
(Tehri Garhwal)

Sirmoor Brass Band

Bengal Group Brass Band

## Infantry

Bikaner Sadul Light Infantry

19th (Bikaner) Battalion,  
Rajput Regiment

1st Cochin Infantry

17th (Cochin) Battalion,  
Madras Regiment

Cooch Behar Band

Band, 4th Gorkha Rifles

4th Gwalior Infantry

5th Battalion (14th Kumaon)  
(Gwalior), Mechanised  
Infantry Regiment

2nd Hyderabad Infantry

22nd (Hyderabad) Battalion,  
Maratha Light Infantry

1st Indore Infantry

15th (Indore) Battalion,  
Kumaon Regiment



Baria State Forces  
 Idar State Forces  
 Lunawada State Forces  
 Rajpipla State Forces

8th Battalion, Grenadiers

**Transport**  
 Gwalior Pony Company

10th Animal Transport  
 Company, ASC

I have referred several times to the pitfalls for the historian in studying this subject, largely because original records were inadequate, or have since been lost or destroyed. For example, there are only two copies of the Indian States Forces Army List in the National Archives in Delhi – one for 1942 and one for 1948. There are none here in the USI. But this is not to imply that the history of these forces has been totally ignored. Indeed, I am aware of work that has been done to trace the activities of military forces maintained by States as far back as the fifteenth century, though whether one can argue for the inclusion of “battle honours” from such times to be carried forward to the ISF units as I have described them today, and beyond into their incorporated Indian Army units, is another matter. But I would argue that there is more work to be done. Sadly, though inevitably, however, many of those who could have contributed from first hand knowledge to the compilation of such a history are no longer with us, and so there remain the “pitfalls” to which I have alluded.