

British Neglect of Artillery in Indian Campaigns

Professor D.D. KHANNA, ndc and R.K. TANDON

THE following extracts are from the manuscript diary* of a young British Artillery officer who came to India in 1801 in the service of East India Company and later accompanied the Grand Army under Lord Lake to chase the Maratha Army of Jaswant Rao Holkar. The manuscript is retained in the British Museum, London. The complete diary, for the period 24th August, 1804 and 23rd August, 1805, is written in a loose sloping hand on 290 fulscale sheets and at various places takes enormous time to decipher. The diary contains several drawings both Architectural and Military and makes a useful addition not only on the pattern of warfare in India during the period but also on European approach to Indian Architecture.

The author preferred to remain anonymous and concluded his diary with these words "I have erased a few Names and Particular works, which might in these days of Intercepted Correspondence, create me not a little trouble—As it is, I cannot hope to escape appearing in Print if my Journal is taken but I have concealed by Name, and such points as might more easily show who was the Author—" Repeated readings of the diary and interpreting events with contemporary records and personalities, has made it possible to locate the Officer as one Lt. James Young who later became a leading personality in India.

James Young was born in Glasgow on 2nd October, 1782 and matriculated from Glasgow University where his father John Young was a Professor of Greek for nearly half a century. James married Jane Frances, daughter of Richard Hamfray in India in 1807. He resigned from the service of East India Company in 1818 and became a Director in the firm of Alexander & Co., Bankers & Agents in Calcutta. He had the distinction of being Sherrieff of Calcutta twice, once in 1838 and again in 1839.

The diary of James Young is a valuable Historical document record of the unusual freedom with which Young puts down his

*The diary is being edited by Professor D. D. Khanna, Head, Department of Defence Studies, University of Allahabad, and will be published by East-West Publications Fonds B.V., London.

comments on his superiors both Military and Civil. James is highly critical of the discriminatory treatment given to Artillery by the British in their Indian Campaigns in early 19th Century. He has highlighted not only the poor quality and out dated arms and equipments used by the British in India but also the miserable conditions of the Artillery officers especially in the service of East India Company. He is also very critical of the British Policy in India and also of the performances of some very senior British Officers including Wellesley and Lord Lake. For both Military and Political Historians the diary puts the period in a rather different complexions.

The extracts from the diary as printed here have not been changed at any point so as to retain its originality even of the abbreviation, punctuations, spellings etc.

A brief background of the Anglo-Maratha relations and operations in the following paragraphs will prepare the background of the diary.

The Treaty of Bessein signed on 31st October 1802 between Baji Rao Peshwa and the British sealed the fate of the Maratha Independence. Immediately after this Treaty the other Maratha Chiefs decided to meet this challenge if necessary by force. The combined forces of Daulat Rao Sindhia and Bhonsla decided to operate in Deccan (South India) while Jaswant Rao Holkar operated in Hindustan (North India). The Maratha forces both in Deccan and Hindustan were defeated in no time and in the Deccan Bhonsla and Sindhia signed a Treaty with the British.

Jaswant Rao Holkar, however, refused to accept the British terms for Treaty and decided to continue his harassing tactics against the British forces in North India. Lord Lake, the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in North India was ordered to recommence hostilities against Holkar and chase his army towards destruction. Holkar, however, at places succeeded in surrounding and humiliating the British Forces leading to the disastrous retreat of a British detachment under Col. Monson. This led to the formation of a Grand Army under Lord Lake to chase and destroy the forces of Jaswant Rao Holkar in North India. The Grand Army under Lord Lake marched from Cawnpoor on the 3rd of September 1804. The Diary deals at length the various aspects and events during the march.

EXTRACTS FROM THE DIARY

SEPTEMBER 9, 1804

The Artillery lost 28 Europeans with Monson's Party—& are really quite dwindling away—to a mere Nominal Corps from the *Fatal*

and *Stup'd Parsimony* of a Blind Govt—in a Department the most essential to their Existence as a State—It is in the Art of Artillery & Engineering alone—that the Country Powers have never yet been able to Rival us—tho' of late years they have been making rapid strids towards it—& notwithstanding this—& the positive Necessity which Commonsense might be supposed to dictate—of keeping this branch of the Art of War—in a state of perfect & Constant Effectiveness—the very opposite Line of Conduct is pursued—& the Regt—of Artillery *alone* in their Service—is about $\frac{2}{5}$ —of its Nominal strength—in Men—& nearly $\frac{1}{2}$ deficient in Commissioned Officers—were I to add to this wretched Account—*The Pitiful & Parsimonious Mode* in which The *Commissariate & Bullock* Departments—are Conducted without *Men—Cattle—Carriages—even Guns entertained*—or *ready for service*—until the Moment when they are actually wanted & it is too late to have them—disciplined—or fit for use—I shd fill up a Volume instead of a Page.....As to the Inefficiency of the Sepoy Establishments—It cannot be better exemplified—than by taking a look at the State of Defence in which we were compelled to leave our own Provinces—all last Campaign—& the present one—when if an Enemy had got into the Dooab or got into it now—he might traverse it at leisure from one End to the other—without scarce meeting with even the shew of opposition—I hope in a few years, to see on the Bengal Establishment—60,000 Regular Infantry—& 3000 Effective Artillery at least—But the *Policy or Economy*—of opening their Purse—Strings—will not, I dare say appear to the Govt—until some severe lesson be taught them—God grant it may not be *More* than a *Mere Lesson* :

SEPTEMBER 13, 1804

We have plenty of Horses—but no Riders—our Little Troop at it's full complement—is only calculated to Men—2 Guns—2 Howitzers—25 Tumbrils—of our whole number—at this Moment—by Death & Sickness 20 or thereabouts are "*hors de Combat*"—& yet we have A Gun & a Tumbril, more than our Establishment which require 12 Draught Horses—& 9 Drivers—The Consequence of this *Augmentation by Inversion*—is real diminution of our strength—Instead of 6 Horses per Carriage, we are compelled to have only 4—as we have no Men to drive more—These 4, having, in addition to The burden of a Dragoon horse *on their Backs* to draw between them a 6 pr $5\frac{1}{2}$ Howzr or Tumbril, are quite unable to do the work, & die—Yet with certain wise heads—it is considered as "*Augmenting our Horse Artillery*"—to add Guns & Horses—without giving Men to work them—so that like the Man who starves in the Midst of plenty—we have the

Reputation of Great strength, while the real fact is, that at present every Gun & every Horse we received adds to our weakness—what Capt. B. thinks on this subject I know not—but I think even the profit which he, & he *alone*—makes by these added Guns & Horses—would not tempt him to receive *one* of them, without a Proportion of Men and Lascars to work them—If he knew what high Ideas are entertained of us & the use we shall be of—by everyone in the Army—All which, will I know be cruelly disappointed—and our shame which ought to fall on the heads of our Superiors—be redoubted—or tripled—In proportion to the exaggerated Ideas now entertained of us—In action—4 Men even, an altogether too few for the Management of a Gun—including the Casualties incident to all Troops—and especially to us—in the Mad and absurd—tho' bold—mode, in which our (erased)—means to act with us—Running up in the Face of an Enemy—Unprotected—Unannoying—until he has got so near—that the Enemy could kill us with their very Pistols or Charge us—long before we could commence our first Round—what have we to do with all this *Changing* etc etc—If we go within 300 Yards—at nearest—we expose ourselves to Musquet Shot—and Is not this throwing away the Principal—the Grand Advantage of the Artillery “He being able to annoy Infy or Cavy at a distance, when their Musquets—or Carbines can not come near you?”—It is—I affirm— & unless it is to be supposed that the Enemy are to be Panic—Struck & never dream of resistance, when they see the Redoubtable Horse Artillery, come Galloping down on them—I do not see how they *possibly could fail* to kill every Men or Horse of us, 'en we could open on them—whatever the Mahrattas may do—I would only ask if any one thinks the French Regt in their place wd suffer a Man of us to return alive to tell the tale? or if one of our own Sepoy Corps—wd not, by a Single well directed Volley, Levelled at the Horses Breasts—put the whole of us “*Hors de Combat*”—? For, be it recollected—as an Argument, stronger than any other purpose, against our approaching too near—That if a Single Horse is killed—in the Harness—(& who can well miss such a train)—The Gun is rendered altogether useless until that Horse is replaced no Relief may be near—and if there is—The Men must dismount—and the Dead or Wounded Horse with difficulty be disengaged from the Harness—This is no work of a moment & while we are about it—must the Enemy—within so short a distance—we supposed to have to *gone to sleep*?—The more I think of this Subject—the more it vexes me—the more I could say on it—if, (erased) does act as he says he will, in this manner—he will perhaps be able to kill numbers of the Enemy, before they run in on his Guns—or have shot *all* his Men and Horses—but he will most undoubtedly—lose *all* his Officers—and *all* his *brave Men*—& leave *his Guns with the Enemy*—In

my opinion—(Altho' the *most obvious reasons*—prevent my opening my Lips to him on the subject till called on) It is no longer a cold question of *Profit and loss*—to be calculated by ordinary Rules of Dr. & contra Credr.—*which* is of most advantage to his Employers & the service—The Killing numbers of the Enemy & losing his Men, Horses, & Guns—or, killing perhaps *fewer* of the Enemy, yet preserving his Corps from Annihilation—Altho' this, sets the question in as *striking* a point of view as any mode of putting it can do—yet there is a sentiment superior to that, which ought to govern the heart of every Brave Man, entrusted with the lives of his Fellow Subjects—Such a Man altho' he is never to think of Danger, where his services are likely to produce Victory—Honor—or even advantage to his Country—Yet, he is to be, specially when, as in the present Case, Success is *at best problematical*—careful of the Lives of his Men not being Wantonly & uselessly Sacrificed"—Yet is our Commander (erased) brave even to daring—but his prejudices are Strong—& having imbibed a false & dazzling Ideas of the superiority of *Horse Artillery* over every other Species of Force—Guns—Cavalry, or Infantry—he will not give up the *Dear Decoits*—It is but justice to him, however, to Say, that I do not believe he even heard or read any Arguments on the opposite Side of the question—to make him inclined to think non-seriously about it—once only did he speak of it to me a year ago—when I merely Combated it slightly upon such Grounds as my Reason told me, made against it—but since then—I have thought much—& read more one on the subject—through the advice & assistance of my most highly esteemed friend Colonel Horsferd—whose opinion—at any time *Gospel* on professional, or literary subjects with me—I am happy to Say, in the present Instance entirely Concede, with my own—From the various Authors chiefly French—which he has lent me—I can see that in their opinion—& in particular in the formal opinion of the Committee of Marshals & Generals of French Artillery—assembled by the late Louis XVI—to try & decide, on the Uses—Merits & Discipline of Horse Artillery—"Horse, a Flying Artillery—was to differ from all other Field Artillery, only in as much as that having More Horses to a Piece—& the Gunners being Mounted—It could with the Celerity of Cavalry move from point to point during action as required—But that in every other *Respect whatever* The Rules for Disciplining the men—& Horses—& using the Gun were to be precisely the same as those for ordinary Field Artillery—which in fact they became—The moment the Gun was unlimbered—& the Men dismounted to Commence firing"—Is this not *Simple—Rational—& Intelligible*? Oh! that I could get (erased) to think it so;

SEPTEMBER 19, 1804

At Calcutta—a shabby Company of Golundauze or Native Artillery Men—is ordered to be raised for the defence of Prince of Wales Island—for the safety of which Govt—seem at last to be anxious—after having left it nearly defenceless, since the French War broke out—To this Company of Artillery, not a single Officer is given yet Regiment or Regiments of Native Infantry are raised, & with them, always the due proportion of Officers, yet the poor neglected Artillery Officers are never to receive benefit by any augmentation : : This is *Justice* :

OCTOBER 25, 1804

Lt. Col. Burn is besides to reduce some Towns & Forts in his way—for which purpose he has taken, besides his Field Pieces—2 or 3—18 Pounders—Judge, all the who by *reading* or *Experience*—know how the Ordnance Department are conducted in France—In *England*—in *Europe*—how they are carried on here, & what a Corps of Artillery we have in Bengal—when I tell you—That with this Train—there is not a single Artillery or Engineer Officer—The 5 or 6 with the “grand army of India”—being already *too few*—to spare even one—but what is even worse—These 18 Pounders—have no ammunition—no shot I mean—& are to depend, for a supply of that *rather necessary article* for a siege—or what they, or the Resident at Delhi—*can procure*—“*Cudite Tencri*” : : :

OCTOBER 26, 1804

— to do the whole of the Garrison & Field Artillery duties—all of all which army & of 5 or 6 Forts & Garrisons—There are *nominally* 2,100 European Artillery—*Really*—(for they have never yet been *nearly* complete)—about 6 or 700 Europeans & about 2 or 300 Golundauze, (or Native) Artillery Men—no state in the Civilized World has nearly so small a proportion—France & the great Continental European states, are out of the question—England during the last peace—had 8 Battns—of 1000 or 1200 Each—& 7 Troops of Horse Artillery—Their Majesties even of Portugal—Naples, or *Ci* = *devant* Sardinia—had far more :—with regards to, to *cherishing*—& *fostering*, what is, or ought to be a *Scientific* Line of service, as it is one, acknowledged, in the Ignorance of European Ideas, to be of the greatest *Use* of any, in the act of War—the French—Austrians—Prussians—the English even—are weak enough, to encourage this Corps, (the Artillery), by giving him Every advantage, in point of *Rank & honours*—over the other *Lines of service*—where Talents are not expected—& scarcely necessary—according, however, to our more

Enlarged Indian Ideas, on these Matters—*Rank—Enrolement & Command*—go in the *Inverse Ratio* of utility to the state—Thus, whereas in England the Artillery Batt have a *Ed Offr* (A Colonel in Second) *more* in proportion than the Infantry—so in India—The Arty have 2 in proportion, fewer than the Infy—& 3 fewer than the Cavalry—, But the Depression under which *our* service lies in this country, from this, & a 100 other similar cause, is too serious a subject for joking—In February 1802 an addition of 6 Companies of Arty was made to our Regt—but *not a single Fd Officer* was added with them—*If* we & the officers of the Infy or Cavy were on a footing *formerly*—(when the army in 1798 was re-organised)—& *if* It was intended that we shd-not in future be *deprived* of our *Equality* in this Grand Respect of promotion—both which points were contained in the spirit of the orders of—98—& were, besides, at the Instance of the Artillery Representatives in 94-5-& 6—stipulated for—& agreed to by our Masters of Leaden=hall street & His Majesty's Ministers—why, on augmentation of the Interior Ranks, was not an equal & fair proportion of the Higher, or the Fd—officers, also given to us?—What political or Military sin has our Unfortunate Corps singly committed, to the singly excluded from the benefit—of our *Equal Chance* of attaining a Fd officers Rank & *Consequent Pension*?—that object, of all others the first in the Prospects of an Indian officer—& on account of which alone—the Equality of Chance to promotion to the higher Rank was bestowed on all branches of the army alike—our Unfortunate Captain, stand at the head of the List of Cpts in the army—while Captains 2 & 3 years their Juniors—have become *Lt Cols* of Infy or Cavalry—for when these Corps have been increased—they have always had the proportion of Field Officers added also—as Colonen Gréane, the Commandant of Artillery, at the Presidency is a, selfish, man-devoted to himself alone—& totally devoid of *Espirt de Corps*—or the most remote Ideas of Public spirit—we have never been able to Interest him in our Cause—but our present Comg Officer in this Army Lt. Col *Horsferd* An Officer of the highest professional ability—as well as the most general knowledge & Literature—whom it were injurious to name in the same page with the former Man—sensible of the Cruel Injustice under which the Corps laboured—both from immediate supercession & ultimate retardation of promotion—presented in Octr 1803, to H.E. the Comr in Ch—them before Agra—a Memorial—stating our wrongs & begging Redress from Govt thro' His Excy' Mediation—The Genl professed himself sensible of our wrongs—& declared he wd forward the Memorial to Govt—a year has since Elapsed—no notice has been taken of us or our Petition—yet daily additions are made to the Infy to the Cavalry—& every such

increase, but adds to the Injuries we have sustained :— Capt Harowick of the Artillery—The senior Captain of the Regt & the principal sufferer—on going home in 1802—was furnished by Col. Horsford with a similar Memorial, to be presented to the Court of Directors—He printed it—signed it in behalf of himself & his Brother Officer in Bengal—The Court were graciously pleased to declare themselves penetrated by our Hardships—& sensible of our Wrongs—They then—consigned it to—*oblivion*—we now, as the last resource—have some thoughts of asking our Col—(Horsford) to press His Ex. the Comr in Ch—for at least the Honor of an answer from Govt atleast a *Yes* ; or *No* : — A favor we have not, in 12 Months been able to obtain—

OCTOBER 27, 1804

This day Lt M W Brown, Qn Mr of the Arty in Camp—and I, met at his Tent, to frame a letter to Lt. Col. *Horsford*—to be signed by the Arty Officers in Camp—requesting him to obtain—if possible from the Comr in Chief—some answer relative to the Artillery Petition of the last year—on the subject of Field Officer—This letter was meant to submit to the Arty Officers, now in the Army—for approval & signature—God Grant that it may succeed : —“Q.F., F.Q.S.”—

OCTOBER 29, 1804

Yesterday Capt Nelly, the Senr Arty Officer in Camp Delivered to Col Horsford—a Letter—signed by all of us except one—Who, altho' no doubt he will rejoice to *benefit by our exertions*—does not chuse to take upon himself, even the *small share* of Responsibility, that wd attach to *his share* of the address—were it either criminal or unjustifiable—whereas it is the humblest, of humble Petitions merely requesting the Comg. Offr—to put His Excy the Cr in Chief in mind of a Petition forwarded by him, in our behalf to Govt a whole year ago—& to which even a *Yes* or *No* has not been deigned—The Officer to whom I have alluded, knows well enough that the Request will not be the less or more Granted or Denied for want of the signature of so insignificant an Individual as he, *for more reasons than one*, is—& shd it be granted—he will without danger of trouble, be one of the first to benefit by it—shd it be refused—he will no doubt pique himself Vastly on his *Penetration*—in seeing the *Folly* or *Impropriety*—of subjects, using their *Undoubted Rights* to humbly Petition their Governor of *Redress*—another reason for this *Generous & Public Spirited* Conduct, in the Person alluded to—I have heard alleged viz that he had not Common Sense enough to discriminate between *modest request*, & *mutinous remonstrance*—but had declared—“that he wd never put his

hand to any thing"—is A *Second Deniel* : "a very Solemon this :s —with regard to these Different opinions, as Sir Roger De Coverby say—"much may be said on both sides"—Be this as it may—Col H—in his observations on the subject to the Officers—had handed him down to recorded & deserved Contempt—I blush to add, that the Officer I allude to, is a *particular* Brother Officer of mine—in the Troop of Horse Artillery—*His Name* ;—*sicken with Envy : hide your Diminished Heads—the object Time servers : the Sycophants & Courtiers* : is in mercy I erase his name—The Col Forwarded his Officers request to Head Qurs in a most nervous & maly Letter in his very best style—particularly dwelling on the aggravation to our Distresses & Supercessions, occasioned by the total refusal of even a *simple answer*— & the serious loss of a whole year, to the Artillery—during which time, their Petition wd have been sent to, & answered by the Court of Directors—& the numerous supercessions we suffer, by the additions to the Infy & Cavalry—either not have existed, or have been patiently born, as irremediable :—