CHAPTER NINE

THE OFFICER CORPS AND THE TRAINING OF THE INDIAN ARMY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO LIEUTENANT-GENERAL FRANCIS TUKER

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There has been much historical research into officering the Indian Army in the period 1919–1945, the vast majority of which has concentrated on the Indianization of the officer corps.¹ However, this chapter will look at the restructuring of officer training during the Second World War through the experience of both Indian and British officers and the contribution of the officer corps towards the evolution of operational doctrine and training in the Indian Army during the war. Pradeep Barua has written on this subject in the context of his wider study of the officer corps and it will also build on the work of Daniel Marston and Tim Moreman during the campaigns in Burma and Malaya.² This essay will demonstrate how the army learnt operational lessons and turned them into effective training across the different theatres.


This new training regime began much earlier than previously suspected is shown by a case study of the wartime career of Lieutenant-General Sir Francis Tuker, who was one of those Indian Army officers who were "more far-sighted than those at the War Office in London." He was originally seen as a ‘Poona Colonel’ (those interested in polo playing) to his contemporaries but not his fellow officers in the 1st Battalion, 2nd King Edward VII’s Own Goorkha Rifles. He became from the 1930’s onwards an inveterate trainer who instigated innovative battalion training. This ultimately led to his appointment as DMT during the early years of the Second World War and then commander of the 4th Indian Division in North Africa and the early stages of the Italian campaign, introducing a series of effective training instructions within the formation.

The Indian Army in the interwar period had two main roles of internal security and policing the frontiers known as ‘Watch and Ward’. The British units did the majority of the internal security with the British officered Indian units providing most of the troops for the North-West Frontier defence. In addition to these roles, the Indian Army acted as ‘External Defence Troops’ to protect interests in the Eastern parts of the British Empire and by 1939 units and formations were stationed in Malaya, Singapore, the Persian Gulf, the Red Sea, Burma, Egypt and Hong Kong. Whilst proficient in all these roles by 1939, historians have agreed that the army was in no fit state to fight a modern army.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, the Indian Army embarked on a massive expansion programme to meet the requests for increased manpower. In 18 months the Indian Army had doubled in size, although it was very short of equipment. To accomplish this meant the availability of large number of experienced non-commissioned officers and VCOs. Further, officers were ‘milked’ from their units in order to form new units. This ‘milking’ of the Indian Army meant that a large number of the new Indian troops had little basic training, in direct contrast to the professional Indian Army of the

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