Delhi and the Indian Mutiny
May to September 1857

The campaign of the Delhi Field Force and its operations to recover Delhi.

By

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Dedicated to my son Tom,

in the hope that by remembering to look backward we may better understand

the best way to go forward.

DJ Mackinnon
Portsmouth
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

For centuries men have fought over the rich and populous sub continent of India. In the last seven hundred years it has suffered from the attentions of Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, European invaders, and from a host of internal power struggles and wars. Although Britain's influence and subsequent control of India played a pivotal part in the history of both countries, it nevertheless only encompasses a period of some three hundred or so years. From its earliest trade links with Britain at the start of the seventeenth century to its independence in the mid twentieth is only one chapter in India's long and turbulent history. During this period India changed from useful trading partner to Crown colony and eventually the most glittering jewel in the Imperial Crown.

Britain invested hugely in India, sent some of its best soldiers and statesmen to secure it, fought wars to defend it, and risked all to control it. From the granting of a Royal Charter by Elizabeth I in 1600 the gateway to India was opened and the East India Company was born. The Company eventually rose to unprecedented heights of power and authority and its fate was linked with that of India for two hundred and fifty years.

But in 1857 the Indian Mutiny rocked the British Empire to its very foundations. It has been seen by some as India's first war of independence. In reality it was a mutiny of military forces, albeit on an unprecedented scale. It is not the intention here to revisit the vast literature on the mutiny, nor to provide an overview of its whole course. Instead the focus will be on one specific part of the conflict, the loss and subsequent recapture of the city of Delhi.

In the early stages of the mutiny Delhi was the only place where the mutineers appeared to be on the defensive against a British force which attempted to maintain

the initiative. Despite being hugely outnumbered the Delhi Field Force, as it came to be known, contained the mutineers for three months before eventually storming and retaking the city. It is through these actions that some of the strongest arguments for the mutiny being something greater than a military insurrection are generated and given the greatest credibility. There is compelling evidence to suggest that the mutiny may have been only a part of a planned general rising, even though no such insurrection took place.

The siege of Delhi figured heavily in the early stages of the mutiny, as it became a focal point and rallying place for the mutineers. The campaign to retake the city and the mutineers' defence of it give many valuable clues to the subsequent course of the mutiny and the reasons for its eventual failure. Delhi's pivotal role in the Mutiny forms the basis for this thesis, and for the argument that the capture of Delhi was not the unique and unlikely victory that history generally suggests.

CHAPTER 1 – THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DELHI

The earliest reference to a settlement at Delhi may be found in the Indian epic "The Mahabharata", which tells of the building of the city of Indraprastha around 1400BC. It is described as being located on a large mound somewhere between Purana Qila and Humayun's tomb, a position broadly speaking that would place it around the area of Delhi. Over the centuries the city was re-founded, and rebuilt many times under a succession of empires and kingdoms. It was invaded by the Tartar conqueror Timur, or Tamerlane as he is better known, in the latter part of the fourteenth century. Timur established his capital at Agra where it remained for 200 years until the first of the Moghal emperors, Babur, swept into India from Samarkand and Kabul. Establishing his own capital at Delhi in 1526, Babur sowed the seeds of a dynasty that would rule for the next 180 years.

The rise of the Moghals, and in particular the evolution of military tactics, doctrine and leadership throughout India, is a field of study in its own right and is discussed in some detail in Jeremy Black's book, *War and the World-Military power and the fate of continents*, (London 1999). Black provides some fascinating comparisons with the evolution of military thinking throughout the world at other junctures in time. He is clear in his conviction that the arrival of Europeans in the sub continent radically changed the way war was fought in the region. Because of this it is easy to forget that India had produced many great soldiers and leaders before the arrival of the European powers. It is a mistake to believe that the Indian was not an accomplished and courageous fighter capable of leading armies to victory before Europeans taught him about muskets, artillery, and close order infantry drill.

Although eventually victorious, British troops suffered heavily in many engagements with native enemies such as the Mahrattas or the Sikhs, in the years before 1857. Whilst it was not common, a defeat at the hands of entirely native armies, led by Indians themselves, was not unknown.

The Moghal Empire is the real starting point in any discussion concerning the significance of Delhi in modern times and it is here that the origins of any connection with the mutiny of 1857 will be found. In 1600 the emperor Akbar, Babur's grandson, granted the charter that allowed the first trade between India and Britain and led to the creation of the East India Company (EIC). Thirteen years later Akbar's own son Jahangir granted permission for the establishment of a permanent trading post just north of Bombay.

The Moghal emperor was however a King of kings. His power was not absolute nor was his area of control. He ruled through a variety of lesser kings, nobles, local leaders and warlords. This was to be the ultimate downfall of the empire, and, when the emperor died in 1707 with no immediate line of succession, the empire was plunged into a series of internal conflicts and power struggles that lasted almost forty years. Foreign invaders were quick to react to the fall of the Moghals. Armies from the northern kingdoms in Persia and Afghanistan invaded many times to carve out new territories for their own rulers. Delhi itself was sacked in 1739 by a Persian army under Nadir Shah.

In this state of constant war and invasion India provided rich opportunities for the bold and daring. Many leaders quickly realised that the way to gain an overwhelming advantage was with European aid. Initially the source of this aid was the EIC. The only other European presence were small Portuguese and Dutch trading stations with little or no governmental support and certainly no military force of their

own. However in 1719 the French arrived in India with their Compagnie des Indes. Quickly becoming bitter trade rivals in India, both companies represented their own governments' plans for the expansion of their respective trade empires. With their parent countries already enemies in Europe, it was clear that the next battleground might be India. It was also apparent that, if the Indians were going to battle amongst themselves, then the Europeans had better back the winning side. Subsequently the EIC began to take more of an interest in Indian political affairs in order to survive and, later, to beat off French expansion and competition.[1]

At the outset of this time of upheaval the EIC had not been well placed to begin the political and military manoeuvring that would be needed to secure its dominance of India. Still primarily a trading operation, it had no military 'muscle' and little political experience. The directors of the Company were unable to rely on Queen's troops from Britain in sufficient numbers to safeguard its interests in an India racked by civil war and foreign invaders, and so realised that the Company would need military forces of its own. It began raising its own troops in 1707 and was already in possession of a sizeable and well-trained army by the time the French arrived in 1719. Initially the regiments were headed by native Indian commandants with a small number of European "advisers". Over time, and as the importance and size of the armies grew, these native commandants were replaced with European officers as more and more young men realised the potential of making their fortune in India.[2]

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[1] A definitive overview of this period is given in several works of P J Marshall, see bibliography. A briefer overview, centred more towards the EIC, is given by Lawrence James in his book, *Raj · The Making and unmaking of British India* (London 1997).

[2] A study on the Indian soldier and the traditional military organisations of India may be found in D H A Kolff's book, *Naukar, Rajput, and sepoy: the ethno-history of the military labour market in Hindustan 1450-1850* (Cambridge 1990).

Although undoubtedly a threat that alarmed both the EIC and the British government, the French had one major disadvantage that the EIC did not - having to deal with the British Royal Navy at sea. For access to India, and control of the Indian littoral, sea-lanes were essential. From the outset it was clear that in any conflict between the two European powers, the British supremacy at sea would hinder any efforts to reinforce India from France.[3] Secure in this knowledge the Company continued to expand both its forces and its influence. By the 1750's the Company possessed the strongest military forces on the sub-continent, surpassing even the Royal regiments of the British army. Robert Clive's victory at Plassey in 1757 dashed French hopes in India and opened the way for complete control of the country by the armies of the Company. Despite continued skirmishes between 1757 and 1760 as well as renewed efforts whilst Britain was entangled in the American War of Independence[4], France never again seriously threatened Britain's dominance in India. Throughout this period of political and military intrigue and action the remnants of the once great Moghal Empire continued to disintegrate and disappear. The importance of the Emperor waned and was subsumed by the new powers in India.

Yet despite the slow disintegration of their empire, the Moghals were still remembered as the legitimate governing authority of India long after their real power was gone. The empire had symbolised a unified country that brought Muslim and Hindu together under a single great leader. It was seen as the true Indian leadership and not that of a foreign invader. Subsequent emperors, although virtually powerless, were nevertheless revered and treated with great respect by the Indian princes and the

[3] See also Paul Kennedy's book, *The Rise and Fall of British Naval Mastery* (London 1976).
[4] Piers Mackesy's book, *The War for America 1775-1783* (Nebraska 1994) makes a number of references to the importance of India in Britain's efforts and the political machinations of France during this period. See pp. 251, 261-262, 380, 391.

general population. Their patronage and blessing was a most powerful tool and was eagerly sought. Indeed the British themselves quickly realised that the key to controlling India was the local princes and warlords, and the key to controlling them was a combination of military power and the blessing of the Moghal emperor. Indeed in 1957, the centenary of the mutiny, the Indian Education Minister made just this point in his foreword to Indian historian S N Sen's history of the mutiny, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven* (New Delhi 1957), when he wrote:

> If the British crown had from the beginning taken any direct part in Indian affairs, the Indians would have realised that a foreign power was entering the country. Because it was a trading company, they did not think of it as a potential ruler.....It is also noteworthy that for a long time the Company never acted in its own name. It always sided with some local Chief in order to advance its own interests.[5]

However over time this lesson was forgotten and only remembered during the mutiny.

By 1857 India was an entirely British colonial possession and the control of the EIC was very nearly absolute. The government had long since removed its trading role, and its single purpose was now the governing of India.[6] There was little need for alliances with local princes and those that had not allied themselves with Britain had been annexed or defeated by force of arms, most recently in the kingdom of Oudh in 1856. This in itself is a point worthy of note as a high proportion of the sepoys of the

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[5] Sen S N, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven* (New Delhi 1957) pp. x-xi.

[6] The Company was ordered to end all its commercial operations by the Charter Act of 1833. Its sole purpose became the governing of India as an agent of the British Government.

Bengal army were from Oudh and this territory was considered by many to be the 'nursery' of the Bengal army.

At the same time the last descendant of the Moghal emperors was living his life out in the Red Fort at Delhi. Bahadur Shah was an old man of 82 years who wrote poetry and enjoyed all the trappings of royalty without power. Paid a pension by the Company, he maintained a substantial court of followers at Delhi along with a small bodyguard of troops under the command of a British officer, Captain C R G Douglas. Shah's was an entirely fictitious sovereignty maintained by the British to placate the people. Held in great esteem by millions of Indians as the father of the nation, it was essential that the British at least appeared to pay the proper level of respect to the Emperor. However, despite this deference, he was to be the last of the Moghals. As early as 1853, the Marquess of Dalhousie[7] had considered ending the dynasty on the King's death but had been frustrated by the strong court following of Shah's family.[8] Having made an unexpected recovery the King continued to live out his days in Delhi. In 1857 the British had already refused to recognize his favourite son Mirza as his heir and in all likelihood would have prevented the succession after Shah's death. This however remains conjecture as the mutiny changed everything, and from the beginning it centred on the city of Delhi. The city, and indeed Bahadur Shah, played a critical role in the struggle, and the value of Delhi to the cause of the mutineers was of paramount importance.

It is therefore somewhat surprising to find that Delhi was garrisoned entirely by native troops in 1857. At first glance, this would seem something of an oversight

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[7] Governor General of India between 1847-56 after Lord Hardinge's resignation.
[8] Private letter from Dalhousie to Sir George Couper, Bart. Dated 18 Aug 1853. Baird J G A, *Private Letters of the Marquess of Dalhousie* (Edinburgh 1910).

on the part of the British. However it was neither possible nor practical to garrison every town or village in India, so forces had to be concentrated in the crucial centres: key areas of strategic, commercial, or symbolic importance, natural chokeholds over the region, places where dissent was strongest or where any possible alternative leadership was based.[9] The question however was one of relative importance; the British were not ignoring the rules of colonial administration but rather were missing the importance of Delhi itself. With a garrison of three native regiments Delhi was given precisely the level of security that its importance and value to the British warranted. But if Delhi could prove to be so important to the Indians, how could it be less so to the British?

There is a somewhat simplistic view that provides one answer to this question. Over many years of fighting and political machinations many believed that the British control over India in 1857 was unassailable. Russia had just been defeated in the Crimea, France was an ally (although not necessarily a trusted one), and the North-West frontier was largely pacified and the recent subjugation of the Punjab had removed the last serious internal threat from native sources.

Clearly there were some flaws in this reasoning, not least of which was the continued distrust of France that led to several invasion scares and the rush of fortification building on the south coast of England in the 1860's. Similarly, while most of India and the Punjab were pacified, they were still held by virtue of the sword; the Punjab alone boasted a garrison of 60,000 men in 1857. Garrisons and

[9] An interesting view on these issues in relation to the British army of the 19th Century may be found in Colonel C E Callwell's book, *Small Wars – A Tactical Textbook for Imperial Soldiers* (London 1896). It was written as a guide for army officers and first printed in 1896. Although later than the mutiny much of the material remains valid as an insight into the thought processes of the British colonial soldier.

military stations stretched out all across British India. The bulk of these garrisons were made up of native troops, and, despite the doubts of some in high authority, the vast majority of British policy makers and military leaders had complete confidence in the loyalty of the sepoys. With these factors in mind it was therefore difficult to identify any threat to British control of India. Where there was no perceived threat, there was little need for expensive military forces to defend against it. European government troops were far more expensive to maintain than native Company ones, and so in Bengal by 1857 the ratio of native troops to European (both Government and Company) was somewhere in the region of 7 to 1. Scarce resources therefore required careful use.

The key to British India, and indeed the tax revenues so important to the EIC, was mercantile trade, and that trade went by sea. The logical progression from this was that seaports flourished and gained vastly in importance. It is no coincidence that the three Indian Presidencies all had their administrative headquarters in seaports. Madras, Calcutta and Bombay thrived and became centres of administrative control and European settlement. Areas that had little to do with trade or no access to the sea were of lesser importance and a matter for the natives, under the watchful eyes of the sepoy armies. The British therefore concentrated their efforts on centres of trade and militarily important areas that might threaten them. However, complacency, and confidence in the loyalty of their native troops, allowed them to forget the importance of symbolic centres and sources of alternative leadership to their own. The very idea of any kind of internal conflict was hard to imagine despite the increasing difficulties that had been occurring within the sepoy ranks recently. At the start of 1857 the large sepoy armies were utterly trusted and relied upon. That is not to say however that the

British trusted the "abilities" of the sepoys without reserve. Recent experiences in the Sikh wars had given many officers pause when some sepoy units had not performed well under fire. It was generally held that the sepoys were only truly effective under the careful control of their white officers and with Queen's regiments in nearby attendance to bolster their confidence. That having been said, their loyalty was rarely questioned and those that suggested the possibility of mutiny in the ranks were rarely taken seriously. This was despite earlier mutinies of sepoys in 1806, 1824, 1852 and more recent small scale mutinies over individual grievances about pay and conditions during 1856 and early 1857. The entire 19th Native Infantry Regiment had been disbanded in March after a bloodless mutiny at Berhampore the preceding month.[10] The mutiny had centred round concerns over new rifle cartridges, a subject that will be returned to.

Despite this the concept of a general rising of the sepoy armies in India was not truly considered. Victorian Britain was on a high. The army was reaping the dividend of success in the Crimea, and more recently Persia, by demobilising many men. Additional troops from Britain would soon be on their way to China for what would be remembered as the "*Arrow*" war. There were simply no troops available to reinforce India and there appeared no reason to do so. In reality the situation was somewhat different.

Those regiments that were already in India were desperately over-extended, with many of the best troops heavily committed in the recently annexed Punjab. In simple terms the British were utterly dependent on the native troops of the EIC. This situation, and the dangers it presented, was by no means a new phenomenon in India.

[10] A good account of the events at Berhampore is given in J A B Palmer's book, *The Mutiny Outbreak at Meerut in 1857* (Cambridge 1966).

As early as 1844 the then Governor General, Lord Hardinge, wrote to his friend Sir Walter James:

> In India no man can say what a month may produce in a country of 120 million of inhabitants governed by an army which is officered by aliens, whilst the mass of the force under these foreign officers consents to co-erce their own countrymen, merely for the sake of pay and pension, mesmerised as it were by a handful of officers exhibiting in the working of the system the greatest phenomenon that the world ever witnessed. [11]

Prophetic and intuitive as these words were, they fell largely on the deaf ears of successive governments desperate to reduce military expenditure and overseas troop deployments. Greater reliance was played on the sepoy armies to guard India with a subsequent increase in the disparity of numbers between European and native troops. By 1857 scarce European troops were a valuable and limited asset shared out to the important cities and garrisons. The city of Delhi was not among them.[12]

The British simply did not see the importance or inherent danger in the

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[11] James, *Raj*, pp. 65-66

[12] In 1854 the British Government withdrew 3 Queens Regiments from India for service in the Crimea. Only one of these was returned prior to the mutiny. J S M David, *The Bengal Army and the Outbreak of the Indian Mutiny*, PhD thesis, University of Glasgow (2001) pp. 9-10. Additionally the numbers of native troops over the period from the late 1840's to 1856 had steadily increased as the EIC acquired more and more territory to govern and administer. Proportions of European troops did not match this increase and whilst the overall number increased in the period, the disparity between European and native continued to increase. At the end of 1856 the armies of the EIC boasted some 300,000 men. However of these only 14,000 were Europeans. Equally the total strength of British Army regular troops in the whole of India was only 23,000, with the majority of these already fully committed in the Punjab. The proportion of European troops to native troops had thus risen from 1:4 in the 1840's to 1:6, and 1:7 in Bengal, by 1856. R Holmes *Redcoat-The British Soldier in the Age of Horse and Musket* (London 2001), p.65. See also Parliamentary Papers HC 1859 Vol V appendix 17 p.379 and Parliamentary Papers HC 1859 Vol. VIII p.13.

symbolic value of Delhi or in the residence in the city of the last descendant of the Moghal emperors. The two combined could only threaten British interests if set up as an alternative to British rule and that would take a widespread popular rebellion and a considerable armed force. The possibility of this succeeding against the sepoy armies was negligible and so not seriously considered. However in fairness to the British planners, they did not completely forget Delhi. The defences and fortifications of the city had been extensively renovated and modernised over the preceding ten years. Apart from its own reasonable native garrison of three regiments, the city was nominally covered by the strong garrison at Meerut, forty miles to the north west. Although too far away to lend immediate support, a cavalry force from Meerut could arrive within a matter of hours. Subsequent infantry and artillery could certainly then follow within two to three days. On the basis of the relative unimportance of Delhi to the British, this was considered more than adequate.

In effect British planners took account only of troop dispositions rather than force composition. On paper Delhi had three regiments of troops to defend it with a further mixed force of cavalry, infantry and artillery within forty miles. But a look at force composition would quickly show that the nearest European force to Delhi was some 40 miles away. Delhi was therefore secure from almost any eventuality except a general mutiny of native troops.

The reasons why the British failed to consider the importance of Delhi or take more adequate measures to defend the city itself are manifestly clear. The city was of little strategic value, was not a key commercial node, and its famous occupant in the Red Fort was a most unlikely leader of revolt. It was in effect a backwater, a decaying monument of things past that required lip service to be paid to it but little

else. And, if the unexpected happened, the native garrison could certainly hold out until reinforcements arrived from Meerut.

The failure was not to mistake the value of Delhi to the British cause, but rather to underestimate the importance it could have to any widespread Indian cause. As there was no threat from any such cause Delhi was largely ignored. After the outbreak of the mutiny this view was very quickly reassessed and the best evidence of this is the immediate reaction of the British political and military command. When news of the mutiny and subsequent massacres at Meerut and Delhi reached the British Commander in Chief, Major General George Anson, his single immediate concern was to move troops on Delhi, quickly realising the effect of not retaking the city as soon as possible. The Governor General of India, Lord Canning, and Sir John Lawrence, Chief Commissioner of the Punjab, were also of this opinion and both men, largely unaware of the problems Anson faced in mobilising his forces, pressurised him to move on Delhi as quickly as possible.[13]

In the short term this proved impossible and this, coupled with the reluctance of the commander of the European troops at Meerut to follow the mutineers to Delhi, made the subsequent siege and eventual storming of the city inevitable.

The fact that the initial outbreak of general mutiny was so close to Delhi was remarkably fortuitous for the mutineers' cause. The question: "Was the mutiny at Meerut spontaneous or part of a larger, pre planned insurrection?" has been frequently

[13] Letter from private secretary of Sir John Lawrence to Secretary of Governor General, dated 23 July 1857. National Army Museum (NAM) Collection 5710/38.

debated but never satisfactorily answered. It is a question that has considerable impact on any study of the significance of Delhi to the mutiny.

There can be little doubt that at the start of 1857 there was a general feeling of unrest throughout many parts of the country and in particular within the army. The Marquess of Dalhousie's radical reforms[14] had not been well received and the increasingly forceful attempts at Christianisation were alarming Hindu and Muslim alike. Up until 1833 Company officers had been actively encouraged to participate in religious festivals and events. Regimental colours were blessed by holy-men and cannon were fired to mark religious occasions. However all of this was swept away by a tide of moral outrage and Christian zeal in Britain against involvement in any kind of idolatry. The subsequent years saw a steady flow of missionaries to India. This fervour was accompanied by increasing indirect political pressure on the religions of India. For a variety of reasons the Bengal army was largely made up of high caste Brahmin and Rajput Hindus mostly from Oudh. In 1850 what became known as the "Hindu Black Act" was passed into law removing the ancient Hindu law that removed the inheritance rights from any Hindu that abandoned the religion. In effect this removed a major drawback to conversion to Christianity and was viewed as yet another part of the government sponsored interference with Indian religions.

More recently the General Service Enlistment Act introduced in 1856 had been seen by many as a direct attack on the Hindu religion. It required all new recruits to the regiments of the Bengal army to serve overseas when required. This

[14] During his tenure as Governor General Dalhousie introduced a number of civil and military reforms which swept away many traditional native Indian laws and rituals. He was personally responsible for the 'doctrine of lapse' allowing the Crown to claim land and property upon the death of prominent Indians if they died without a natural heir. Equally his policies and reforms removed or revised many of the older religious laws and customs that many Indians held dear. Dalhousie also made great inroads in reforming the organisation, allowances, and conditions of service, of the native armies.

would almost certainly involve a sea passage and so faithful Hindus would be unable to cook their own food or drink from separate sources of "purified" water. Such actions would break their caste and ensure they were treated as outcasts on their return home.

At the same time Muslims, though not as numerous in the Bengal army, were equally concerned over the attitude of their British masters to their faith. Theirs was, after all, the religion of the Moghals, the last ruling dynasty of India. Many had been alarmed at new regulations introduced in 1855 that required Muslim prisoners in jails to shave their beards, allegedly for hygiene reasons. Similarly prisoners were ordered to dispose of their brass lotas (drinking vessels) and replace them with earthenware ones. The lotas were made from brass to allow ease of cleansing if they were touched by impure lips or hands; the earthenware version was clearly much more difficult to purify.[15] These regulations alone caused small-scale riots and much distress in many areas.

Zealous Christian missionaries and their English language schools were spread throughout India. Evangelising Baptists openly decried Hindu and Muslim alike and regularly attacked the EIC's previously even- handed approach to Indian religious sensibilities. This "attack" on religion was by no means officially recognised or encouraged, but similarly it was not condemned and no attempt to control the missionaries was made despite the concern of some senior army officers that their efforts were proving disruptive. Indeed some officers welcomed their efforts. The Commanding Officer of the 34th Native Infantry, Colonel S G Wheeler, made it his

[15] Christopher Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny-India 1857* (London 1980) pp. 52-53.

personal policy to convert sepoys to Christianity if at all possible and he was not alone in this view.

Aside from religious fears there were also many who believed in the prophecy that had followed Clive's victory at Plassey in 1757, which foretold the end of British rule 100 years later. All these factors, and many more localised reasons for general discontent, were simmering under the surface at the start of 1857 and being exploited by the small minority of ringleaders and agitators that exist in any divided society.

Rumours and whispers continued to spread disaffection throughout India and gave rise to the somewhat bizarre "Chupatty Movement", as it came to be known. Small flour cakes, or chupatties, were taken by hand at night to towns and villages where the headman was told to prepare similar chupatties and pass them on to the next settlement. No reason was ever given nor any explanation asked for. Yet quickly the practice became widespread and by its very unexplained nature became most perplexing. The only real theory to emerge to explain the nature of this movement came from a member of the native police in Delhi. Mainnuddin Hassan Khan was asked by the local magistrate what he thought of the whole business of the chupatties. He could offer no factual explanation other than an old story his father had told him that, "upon the downfall of the Mahratta power, a sprig of millet and a morsel of bread had passed from village to village." [16]

Interestingly, as was noted by Mark Thornhill, a survivor of the mutiny himself, in his book, *The Personal Adventures and Experiences of a Magistrate during the Rise, Progress, and Suppression of the Indian Mutiny*, (London 1884), this

[16] C Metcalfe *Two native narratives of the Mutiny of Delhi* (London 1898) pp.39-41. This subject was also discussed, again to no avail, at the trial of Bahadur Shah. Parliamentary Papers HC 1859 XVIII, "A Copy of the Evidence taken before the Court appointed for the trial of the King of Delhi", pp. 129-130.

practice of passing chupatties or cakes had occurred in Madras prior to the Vellore mutiny of 1806.[17]

The concern at forthcoming unrest was not solely vested in the civilian population. Sir Charles Napier, who had resigned as British Commander In Chief after the annexation of the Punjab in 1849 over an unrelated quarrel with Dalhousie, was of the opinion that a mutiny of native troops was inevitable and told Dalhousie as much. Dalhousie did not share this view and the warning went unheeded.[18] Later, during 1857, many European officers noted strange events that led them to wonder if trouble really was coming in the ranks. Several officers received veiled warnings from their troops or servants, of a forthcoming popular uprising that would be supported by the sepoy armies. Both Colonel Sydney Cotton and Colonel Montagu Hall received such warnings.[19] Many were urged to return to England on leave to avoid the forthcoming "massacre of firinghis".[20] Perhaps most telling was an unusual, and mostly overlooked occurrence, which was highlighted in a letter written by Captain J S Rawlins of the 44th Native Infantry:

Before the year 1856 had closed a singular circumstance was brought to my notice, which surprised me not a little. It had always been the ambition of native officers to invest their savings in what they called "Company's Kargus", or

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[17] M Thornhill, *The Personal Adventures and Experiences of a Magistrate during the Rise, Progress, and Suppression of the Indian Mutiny* (London 1884) p. 2.

[18] Napier's resignation was precipitated by his countermanding of Dalhousie's orders to abolish 'batta' – a traditional allowance paid to sepoys in the field. It was the last in a string of disagreements between the two and Dalhousie's public rebuke of Napier prompted his resignation. Napier returned to England and published a book – Gen Sir C Napier *The defects, Civil and Military, of the Government of India* (London 1853) – in which he laid out his views including the dangers of a sepoy mutiny. See also T A Heathcote *The military in British India* (Manchester 1995) pp. 86-88.

[19] Private Papers of Colonel Montagu Hall. Unreferenced paper dated Jul 1857. Hall Papers, NAM collection.

[20] Evidence of Col John Leslie. Parliamentary Papers HC 1858, XVIII, p.111 - , dated 26 Aug 1858.

"Government Paper" and every officer throughout the Army possessed Paper to the value of 3 or 4,000Rs. and some as much as double…I found out that during the past year all my native officers had parted with their "Paper" and turned it into gold mohurs. I endeavoured to ascertain the cause of so extraordinary a proceeding, but got evasive answers and failed to do so……but as the Mutiny followed a couple of months later, the circumstance explained itself. [21]

There are many other reports and testaments that suggest that some sort of mutiny in the sepoy ranks was being planned. Conversely there are equally compelling reasons to believe that the mutiny was spontaneous and merely spread from regiment to regiment, each waiting for the other to act first. However, almost certainly there were a small number of agitators who applied peer pressure to their fellows and persuaded them to join the ranks of the mutineers, and so it is reasonable to assume that at least some small elements in the army and country as a whole were plotting insurrection.

The difficulty is to decide whether this plotting by minority groups was responsible for the mutiny or whether they merely exploited and profited from a most opportune spontaneous occurrence. The events at Berhampore and the actions of Mangal Pande[22] at Barrackpore seem to indicate attempts to generate an outbreak of mutiny that would perhaps spread, and both events provide evidence of individuals orchestrating events from behind the scenes for the majority.

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[21] Maj Gen J S Rawlins, *The Autobiography of an Old Soldier* (Weston super Mare 1883), p.152.
[22] Mangal Pande was a soldier of the 34th Native Infantry who called on his fellow troopers to rise up and fight for their religion against the British. During his one-man mutiny at Barrackpore in March 1857 he wounded a British officer and NCO. He was reported as crying out that others had incited him to mutiny but were now not prepared to join him in the fight. Even more significant is that Pande's actions were witnessed by dozens of sepoys, who, with only a single exception, failed to come to the assistance of the Europeans under attack. Pande was court martialled and hanged on 7 April. By coincidence, the Commanding Officer of the 34th was Colonel S G Wheeler, mentioned earlier for his efforts at conversion to Christianity.

If we make the reasonable conclusion then, that there was some form of subversive movement, however small or large, within India and particularly the army, plotting an insurrection against British rule, we then have to ask how this group would commence its campaign. The support of the native sepoys was absolutely essential. If they were not involved then the enterprise was doomed to failure. However, many sepoys, in fact probably the majority, were loyal to their British masters. Troubled by recent events and changes, they were angry and restless, but open mutiny was something else. What was needed was a lever, a common focus point to unite the sepoys against the British. Despite the myriad of different backgrounds, beliefs and castes of the sepoys, the one thing that united them was their respective devotion to their own religions, beliefs and castes. Both devout Hindus, and Muslims who had no caste, would fight if they believed there religion or caste was endangered.

As shall be seen, some historians quoting contemporary sources, have argued that caste or religious beliefs were utilised by the Bengal sepoys far more as an excuse to avoid unpleasant work than as a result of any religious zeal. Difficulties of caste were far less apparent in the Madras and Bombay armies. The mutiny at Barrackpore in 1825, when sepoy troops were ordered to march to Burma to reinforce British troops, was supposedly over grievances based upon caste issues. However many believed that the issue was manipulated simply because the sepoys did not wish to travel to Burma where reports of disease and defeat were rife. Sir John Kaye, one of the great historians of the 1857 mutiny, believed the actual cause of the 1825 mutiny

to have been a desire, "to find a pretext for refusing to march on such hazardous service."[23]

Similar concerns were raised during the 1852 mutiny, despite sepoys from Bengal having served overseas before in Mauritius, Java and China. The previous difficulties over sea voyages had been overcome with these earlier campaigns, so the only apparent difference would appear to be the final destination and the employment of the troops once they arrived.

Equally it was widely believed that the officers of the Bengal army pandered far more to caste issues than their Bombay or Madras compatriots, and as a result the Bengal sepoys used caste issues as a bargaining chip in disputes and grievances. Bengal sepoys and sappers were excused manual labour digging trenches and latrines, whereas their Madras or Bombay colleagues were not, again on the supposed grounds of caste.

What is more pertinent is the possibility that what a sepoy actually considered a genuine threat to his religion or caste was somewhat different from what his European officers believed. As a result many issues, reforms, regulations, and Christian Missions, all of which were heralded as threats, were more likely in fact to have been seen by some sepoys as opportunities to gain leverage over their European officers. These issues were seized upon and manipulated to create unrest and dissent in support of other more earthly grievances. All that was then needed for outright dissent was some catalyst to speed up the process.

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[23] Sir John Kaye and Colonel George Malleson (editor), *History of the Indian Mutiny* 6 Vols (London 1878-80), Vol. I pp. 193-194.

The British themselves provided this catalyst in the form of the cartridge issue. New rifle cartridges, coated in animal fat, have come to be popularly acknowledged as the cause of the mutiny outbreak. In fact it was merely the spark that lit the powder trail to the magazine. If a subversive group was plotting a mutiny in India then the cartridge issue was a heaven-sent opportunity. The cartridges, being allegedly waxed in both cow and pig fat, were guaranteed to cause trouble with Muslim and Hindu alike, and it was the refusal to use them that led to the outbreak of the general mutiny. But an outbreak in the army was not enough for a popular uprising. What was also required was a focus, a rallying cause or leader.

Undoubtedly the most symbolic of rallying places for a rising against British rule was Delhi, the ancient Moghal capital. Not only did the city hold a special place in the hearts and minds of many Indians, but it also possessed the last of the Moghals, the Indian rulers of India. It was the perfect rallying place for a popular rebellion, possessing an entirely native garrison but with sufficient European presence and interests to make the British instantly take note. However any uprising in Delhi would be a small affair, limited in scope, and could quickly be suppressed by the strong, heavily European biased, garrison at Meerut. If any uprising was to gain momentum it would need time, and so the question of using Delhi successfully revolved around the garrison at Meerut.

The outbreak of the Indian Mutiny as a general rising started at Meerut, notwithstanding the general unrest throughout many other stations. This in itself has always been something of a mystery to historians. Of all the garrisons in India,

Meerut, with the highest proportion of European to native troops anywhere in the country, was perhaps the most unlikely of settings for the events that followed.

The Meerut garrison at the beginning of May 1857 was under the command of Brigadier Archdale Wilson and was in turn part of the Meerut Division under Major General W H Hewitt. The European forces of the garrison consisted of the 6th Dragoon Guards, one battalion of the 60th Rifles, one light field battery, and a party of Horse Artillery. The garrison also consisted of native troops, comprising the 3rd Native Light Cavalry (NLC), 11th and 20th Native Infantry (NI), and a contingent of sappers and miners. In total the garrison consisted of 1,863 European troops of all ranks and 2,912 natives of all ranks.[24] It is this close parity, in comparison to other garrisons, that makes the initial outbreak at Meerut so unusual.

The new Enfield rifle had been issued to troops at Meerut in January 1857. The initial issue had been to the European troops and had passed without difficulty. However, when the troops of the 3rd NLC were ordered to parade on 24 April to learn the new firing drill, the officers were warned that the troops would refuse to handle the new cartridges as it was believed they were greased in animal fats. In reality this was untrue, the cartridges having been prepared, in accordance with army instructions, with linseed oil and bees wax.[25] There were however doubts, which remain even now, over the tallow used in the process, and it was never fully established if animal fats had been used or not.

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[24] P J O Taylor, *A Companion to the Indian Mutiny of 1857* (Oxford 1996), p. 216.

[25] The official army instructions issued by the Military Board were as follows: "To 3 pints of country linseed oil add ¼ of a pound of beeswax, which mix by melting the wax in a ladle, pouring the oil in and allowing it to remain on the fire until the composition is thoroughly melted." These orders were issued in 1847 by letter from the Military Secretary to the Adjutant General having been approved by the then Governor General Lord Hardinge. British Library – Oriental and India Office Collection (OIOC). Letter dated 6 Apr 1847-Records of Military Consultations 1847-1848. The subject is also discussed by Taylor, *A Companion*.. (p.70) and in more depth in the papers of D C Macnabb held by the Cambridge University Centre for South Asian Studies (CSAS).

The drill of 24 April was to take place with the old cartridges and it had been modified to allow the troops to tear the ends off rather than bite them. This modification however fell on deaf ears, with protestations that it was impossible to differentiate between the old and new, and indeed there were rumours that even the old cartridges had now been coated in a form of animal fat. A representation of the problem was sent to the commander of the 3rd NLC, Colonel G M Carmichael-Smyth, an unpopular officer who had little time for native issues. Aware of recent problems with the new cartridges earlier in the year at Ambala, and the mutiny of the 19th NI at Berhampore, he must have realised the importance of the issue but firmly believed that the new drill, avoiding mouth contact, would overcome the sepoys' fears.[26] Subsequently, on 24 April, some 90 men of the 3rd NLC paraded to receive three cartridges each, and to learn the new drill. Of the 90 men, 85 refused to accept the cartridges, insisting they would receive a "bad name" by accepting and saying they would only do so if other regiments did likewise. Interestingly, it would appear that the sepoys were more concerned about being ostracised by their comrades than about defying their own religious beliefs as individuals. Time and again sepoys before the mutiny refused the cartridges and would only accept them if others did. This had been the case at Berhampore in February and again at Meerut in April. After direct orders from Carmichael-Smyth proved unable to convince the men they were all removed from duty and confined to the camp.

[26] J S M David also discusses the cartridge issue in detail in his PhD thesis entitled, "The Bengal army and the outbreak of the Indian Mutiny", University of Glasgow, Thesis 12188 (2001). David shows most convincingly that the cartridge issue was manipulated to create discontent even after amendments to the firing drill and procedures were adopted. Indeed, each time the British altered their approach to this problem the focus of complaint would shift to some new angle on the issue. No sooner had the British allowed the sepoys to grease their own cartridges than a complaint was raised about the paper of the new cartridges. When this was acted upon a new complaint arose about the paper of the old style cartridges. It is difficult not to agree with David's conclusion that the whole issue was manipulated to achieve discontent rather than voice a genuine grievance. David, "The Bengal army..", pp. 171-174.

All 85 men were subsequently court-martialled and found guilty by a board of fifteen native officers.[27] The sentence was 10 years imprisonment and hard labour, a harsh punishment, which speaks volumes for the content of Carmichael-Smyth's report. The sentence was carried out in front of the entire garrison on 9 May. The prisoners were stripped of their uniforms, shackled, and marched off to the local jail under guard. This stripping of uniforms and shackling in public had not been part of the original sentence but had been carried out on the orders of the Deputy Judge Advocate to ram home further the example to the other men of the regiment. The cries of the prisoners caused considerable upset and unrest in the sepoy ranks and it was generally felt by both native and European that this wholly theatrical way of carrying out the already harsh sentence was not only unnecessary, but also degrading, humiliating and provocative.

Shortly after six o'clock on the following day, Sunday, 10 May 1857, the native troops at Meerut mutinied. Strangely it was the native infantry that rose first and the cavalry only later. Palmer has attributed this to the fact that the ringleaders of discontent had probably been amongst the 85 troopers imprisoned and therefore the cavalry were without their usual leaders on that night. Whilst this argument is logical, what it also implies is that there must already have been collaboration between the native cavalry and infantry and that sufficient ringleaders remained free to convince the infantry to mutiny. Also of interest is the fact that the rising was preceded by trouble in the local bazaar and rumours that European troops were on their way to disarm the sepoys. This was untrue but bore a startling similarity to events that led to

[27] This was common practice but significantly in this case several of the officers were drawn from the Delhi garrison regiments.

the outbreak at Berhampore three months earlier. A similar pattern was seen with later outbreaks of the mutiny at a number of stations. At Nasirabad the outbreak was reported by one officer who wrote, "When the news from Meerut arrived every precaution was taken but it was the agitators in the bazar that precipitated the crisis among the sepoys"[28]

Returning to Meerut, mutineers attacked the local jail and freed the cavalry troopers. They then went on the rampage, accompanied by crowds from the bazaar and prisoners released from the jail, killing any Europeans they could find. Interestingly the murders of Europeans are attributed in many contemporary sources, and subsequent historians' works, to relatively few sepoys, with more numerous attacks attributed to civilian elements of the mob.[29]

The native lines were burned and homes ransacked. Many officers trying to reason with their men were shot down where they stood and mutilated. Women and children were not spared, and many were killed. Small groups or individual sepoys tried to protect or hide their European masters but these were in the minority. Interestingly the sepoys now showed no reluctance to break into the armoury and use the ammunition there to attack Europeans, confirming the point made earlier about social ostracisation. They were content to use the cartridges if everyone else was.

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[28] Taylor, *A Companion..*, p. 241. Similar incidents were recorded at Banda, Bareilly and Fatehgarh. Equally the involvement of elements of the civil population at Delhi, Lucknow, and Cawnpore is discussed later and in some depth in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

[29] Many accounts make much of the murders committed by the Muslim butchers from the bazaar. Equally Major Henry Greathed at Meerut and Thomas Metcalfe at Delhi, in their accounts, suggest that many of the murders can be attributed to the mob rather than individual sepoys, several of whom attempted to protect their European masters. H Greathed Papers, MS letter (undated other than Jun 1857), NAM Collection. See also correspondence between Campbell and Metcalfe families, Box VI, Letters of Sir Edward Campbell during the mutiny at Delhi. May-Jul 1857. CSAS. Greathed subsequently was involved in the operations at Delhi and his papers provide many valuable insights to operations before and after the siege.

Meanwhile the surviving European officers ordered the 60th Rifles, 6th Dragoon Guards, and the artillery to muster on the parade ground of the 60th. This was achieved quickly but then the initiative was lost with long and unnecessary roll calls and ammunition distribution. Shortly after 8 o'clock the troops moved off towards the now burning bungalows. Significantly it was impossible to alert Delhi to the situation as the telegraph had been cut between the two stations as early as 4 o'clock that afternoon. The European troops found little but burning buildings and mutilated corpses. The vast majority of the native troops had already set off down the Delhi road. At this point Hewitt, the senior British officer, and Wilson made the staggering decision not to pursue the mutineers but to fortify Meerut instead. The decision was based on the continuing presence of civilian rioters from the earlier trouble in the bazaar and the concern that they might yet endanger the European civilian population. However, with the departure of the majority of the mutineers, even a small detachment of troops could have provided this protection at Meerut, and a clearer case of closing the barn door after the horse has bolted is difficult to imagine. In the following months both men were heavily criticised for the decision. Meanwhile, though many of the mutineers had gone home, the vast majority, almost certainly harried by ringleaders and peer pressure, headed for Delhi.[30]

The morning of 11 May began like any other in Delhi. The troops of the military station on the ridge two miles to the north, overlooking the city, had paraded early in the morning. The entire garrison, consisting of the 38th, 54th, and 74th Native Infantry regiments, as well as a battery of native artillery, had been mustered to hear

[30] Palmer provides an excellent account of events at Meerut. His conclusions tend toward Meerut being a pre-planned insurrection that was part of an attempt to spark off a spontaneous mutiny across the country. His logic and research are hard to fault and the evidence presented clearly indicates that events at Meerut, at least, were not spontaneous but planned in advance.

the general order detailing the execution of Mangal Pande at Barrackpore. Interestingly this order would have been read to the Meerut garrison at the same time had events the previous evening been different. Almost certainly this was pure coincidence, as had any plot to use this event existed then one would have expected simultaneous disruptions at other stations and garrisons. However, with the order fresh in their minds, the execution of Mangal Pande must have had some influence on the Delhi garrison when the mutineers from Meerut arrived later that day. Perhaps this was another example of fortuitous timing and good luck for the ringleaders of the mutiny now heading for Delhi.

Around 7 o'clock in the morning the first cavalry elements from Meerut arrived at the Red Fort to ask the king for his help in their fight for their faith. A seemingly somewhat surprised Bahadur Shah made no reply. Some time later a much larger force of cavalry and infantry arrived. Small individual skirmishes began to break out in the city between the newly arrived troops and the Europeans. These skirmishes quickly turned to open violence and murder. Meanwhile the garrison on the ridge, alerted to difficulties in the city, was mustered and marched down to Delhi. The events that followed mirrored those at Meerut, when the native troops, ordered to fire on the rioting mutineers, turned instead on their own officers. Again many Europeans were killed and property destroyed. Within hours only a small handful of troops, of dubious reliability, accompanied the surviving European officers and NCOs that had rallied in the city's Main Guard whilst Delhi was ransacked. The expected reinforcements of European troops from Meerut never arrived and the small group of survivors became more desperate. A separate group, under the command of Lieutenant G Willoughby, had already taken it upon themselves to destroy the city's main magazine before joining the others. They had held the magazine through most

of the morning following Willoughby's refusal to surrender it to a number of Bahadur Shah's retainers. These men from the Red Fort had arrived shortly after the mutineers from Meerut, and, whilst it has never been established if they were acting upon Shah's direct orders, certainly they were reported as having demanded the magazine in the name of the King of Delhi.[31] After Willoughby's refusal the retainers were joined by mutineers who assaulted the magazine unsuccessfully for three hours before being provided with scaling ladders, again by men from the Red Fort, to escalade the walls. This prompted Willoughby to fire the magazine and make good his escape. This was not the only appearance of Shah's retainers: they were also implicated in the murder of a number of Europeans, notably Captain Douglas at the Red Fort.

Shortly after the destruction of the magazine the few remaining troops at the Main Guard also mutinied and the surviving Europeans, now including families from the city, were pursued out and over the embrasures. Scrabbling into and up the other side of the entrenchments around the city, some escaped to make their way to safety but many more were shot down in the attempt.

Another large group had congregated at the Flagstaff Tower under the command of Brigadier Graves, late of the Delhi garrison. Despite suggestions to fortify and make a stand, there were simply no troops to do so and the position was abandoned. The various groups split up and made their own way cross country with varying degrees of success.[32]

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[31] Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny*., p. 100.

[32] An account of one of these escapes, typical of most, can be found in the personal narratives of George Wagentreiber and Miss Haldane. Printed as *The Story of our Escape from Delhi in May 1857, from personal narratives by the late George Wagentreiber and Miss Haldane* (Delhi 1894) by Miss Wagentreiber (George's sister).

By early evening the entire city was in the hands of the mutineers. All the European inhabitants had been killed, captured, or had fled. The expected attack from Meerut had not materialised and the mutineers now drew breath while the plundering of the city continued.

The following day Shah, being styled "The King of Delhi", called a durbar, or council. This was an event that had not been held for fifteen years and was aimed directly at handling the current crisis. Having initially appeared unhappy about the arrival of the mutineers, Shah quickly came round to the idea of leading his people in a holy war against the British. The native officers of the mutineers were called forward and explained their grievances, asking Shah to support and lead them and in return offering their loyalty. Shah agreed and soon after began the process of appointing his princes to positions of command within the army. His eldest son, Mirza Moghul, was appointed Commander in Chief. Thereafter letters were dispatched to the local princes and rajahs asking for military support to be sent to Delhi, while in the meantime the organisation and defence of the city itself were attended to. The King also issued a proclamation calling on all Muslims and Hindus to join the fight and rid India of the British.

The speed with which all this was achieved is surprising. One would have anticipated some form of hesitation or delay on the part of Bahadur Shah in immediately taking up arms against his British sponsors and protectors. Yet, quite the contrary, within 24 hours of the arrival of the mutineers the King of Delhi had accepted their allegiance, offered his leadership, appointed generals, and sent for widespread support. This would seem somewhat dynamic for an 82 year old man who did not agree with, and had been surprised by, the mutiny. Conversely it could

be said that there was little that he could have done to refuse the mutineers, although certainly it is most unlikely any harm would have been allowed to come to him even if he had. Nevertheless the rapid sequence of events is perhaps indicative of either some pre-knowledge of events, or some very strong and rapid advice from some other party within the Royal court. This would also appear to be supported by the early murder of Captain Douglas in the Red Fort and the attempt to seize the Delhi magazine by the King's retainers.

Over the following days and weeks trouble erupted throughout Bengal and more sepoys arrived at Delhi to join in the defence of the city and escape the remaining British forces. The mutiny spread so rapidly that it left the British almost paralysed. Yet, despite the call for a great war of independence, large numbers of native Indians did not flock to the colours. Many sepoys, after rising, simply went home to their families, and, in particular, the inhabitants of Delhi were none too enthusiastic about the presence of the mutineers.

Poorly treated and taken advantage of, shopkeepers refused to open to the soldiers and several merchants and vendors packed up and left altogether. Sepoys would break into private dwellings and plunder them on the pretence of searching for Europeans. Indeed, with the exception of the minority already mentioned above general public support was not forthcoming, and many wanted a return to the ordered and safe rule of the British. Despite these difficulties, the mutineers were forged into an effective defence and the city continued to function, albeit somewhat shakily. However it was clear that not everyone in the city sided with the mutineers.

Munshi Jivanlal who was a public official in Delhi at the time of the mutiny kept an accurate diary of events. Of interest is the following entry:

May 27 – It was discovered today that the guns in the bastion had been spiked, while others had been filled with stones, gravel and the ends of string. Great excitement prevailed as it was clear that the English had some powerful friends in the city… [33]

Undoubtedly the hoped for widespread popular support was not forthcoming in all of Delhi. Despite this, by the end of May, many thousands of mutineers had entered Delhi and secured its defence. The city did not degenerate into widespread chaos as the British had hoped and it was clear that it would have to be retaken by force.

So what then of the questions concerning Delhi? Clearly by either accident or design it became the early focus point for the Indian Mutiny and its recapture was as important to British plans as its defence was to the mutineers. But was it all a coincidence or a cleverly laid out plan? The argument between the "planned" and "spontaneous" viewpoints is a complex one. The evidence would seem to indicate some planning amongst the sepoys of the various regiments: the warnings to officers, the conversion of paper money, the "chupatty movement", and even the sabotage of telegraph wires between Meerut and Delhi two hours before the outbreak of mutiny. Even the rapidity of the spread of the mutiny and the amazingly sudden and dynamic efforts of Bahadur Shah, not to mention his personal retainers at the palace, seem somewhat indicative of a staged event that was anything but unexpected. And yet, if this was the case, and Delhi was to be the focus and rallying point, why not plan a

[33] Jivanlal narrative. Metcalfe, *Two native narratives..*, pp. 98-123.

simultaneous uprising? No trouble erupted in Delhi until ***after*** the arrival of the mutineers from Meerut. Surely the most obvious and simple plan would have been for the troops at Meerut and Delhi to rise simultaneously. The native garrison at Delhi, three regiments, was more than enough to secure the city until the Meerut troops arrived, so why wait?

Perhaps the answer is a distillation of both viewpoints. Almost certainly there were elements planning an uprising or rebellion. But their plans were not yet generally known nor indeed supported. They may well have been a small, fanatical group with grander visions of their own abilities than was actually the case. The word was spreading amongst the sepoys and many knew trouble was coming. Perhaps even dates for simultaneous uprisings were being planned or discussed. However, from the events of early 1857 it is possible to conclude that the general plan was to provoke a local uprising, which would then spread throughout the army and India. Having failed at Berhampore and Barrackpore the plotters finally succeeded at Meerut. This would explain the domino effect of the mutiny, which seems inconsistent with the other, seemingly planned events. The ringleaders of the sepoys at Meerut knew little of the state of the overall plans for insurrection but, once it had begun, they knew it was critical to rally at Delhi. The garrison at Delhi, perhaps already warned of events at Meerut, learned of the successful rising as their fellow sepoys arrived at Delhi the following day. They then reacted in the way they had been planning to do once the word was given. As word spread the sepoys followed the course of action that the agitators and plotters had been planning for them, but the uprising did not gain the anticipated widespread support of the general populace, and the expected national uprising did not materialise.

It is possible that the plotters were forced into acting sooner than they planned after their earlier failures by the events at Meerut. The court martial may simply have been too good an opportunity to let pass. Coming as it did coincidentally at the end of April, it found the European troops preparing for the hottest month of the Indian year. Many senior officers, including the Commander in Chief, were away from their commands enjoying the cooler climate of the mountains. It was generally held that campaigning by European troops in India during May would lead to widespread casualties from the heat. Perhaps then, with such fortuitous timing, the temptation to try to generate another outbreak was just too much. Because of this, or perhaps not realising the true feelings of the majority of Indians, the plotters had little time to continue to secure support from outwith the army. Public support was therefore diversified and polarised by regions.

If this hypothesis is accepted, then the logical conclusion is that the birth of a war of independence encompassing all of India was both premature and still-born. This view is of course subjective and impossible to prove conclusively, but the evidence, albeit circumstantial, is compelling. In any event, and regardless of the reasons, planning or otherwise, and motivation of the mutineers, it is an inescapable fact that Delhi was crucial to their cause.

In the history of the mutiny there are a number of cities, towns, and military stations that played significant roles in the course of events. But of all these places none was as important to the mutineers, or as dangerous to the British, as the city of Delhi. It was to Delhi that the initial mutineers from Meerut fled, and it was to Delhi that a great many subsequent mutineers followed them. It was at Delhi that the first real attempts by the mutineers to justify their actions as an independence movement

occurred, and it was here that the first attempt at a nominal leadership of the mutiny as a whole was formed. In essence Delhi was where the mutineers raised their standard and proclaimed the fight to the rest of the Bengal army and the Indian population as a whole. The city became the rallying point for the committed, and the symbol that tipped the balance for the undecided. The notion of the mutineers rallying around the last descendants of the Moghal emperors to throw off the British oppressors and invaders was a powerful and evocative one. It gave the mutiny the appearance of legitimacy and, it was hoped, would provide a springboard for a more general uprising of the populace. If the British were to crush this rebellion quickly and prevent it becoming a holy war to free all of India, they had to defeat the large army at Delhi and retake the city.

CHAPTER 2 – THE DELHI FIELD FORCE

Although quick to realise the dangerous situation that was developing, and the inherent danger of the rebels holding Delhi, the British were painfully slow to respond. At Meerut General Hewitt had formed an impressive, but ultimately useless, static defence and refused to move without either orders or reinforcements. The British Commander in Chief, General Anson, although desperate to move on Delhi, had no transport or supplies immediately available. Even if he had, there were barely enough reliable European troops to secure his line of advance, let alone fight a pitched battle. And so with Hewitt's inaction at Meerut and Anson's lack of transport, the mutineers were given an invaluable breathing space to rally support and organise their forces.

In fact it was not until 25 May that Anson moved from Simla toward Bagpat and a rendezvous with Hewitt's forces. However his advance was to be short lived. His sixty years began to take their toll and, undoubtedly under considerable stress and already in poor health, he died of cholera on 27 May at Kurnaul. An unpopular CinC who, because of his lack of combat experience, had been seen as a political appointee, he was not missed and indeed many believed that his death actually forwarded the British cause. One newspaper reported his death with, "General Anson's death saved him from assassination. He was hated by the troops and they burnt his tents. He was quite unfitted for the post."[34]

Anson was succeeded by General Sir Henry Barnard, a 58 year old veteran of the Crimea who had spent the majority of his career in staff appointments. Quickly

[34] *Daily News* (London Ed) 5 Aug 1857.

picking up the reins of his new command he immediately pushed on towards the meeting with Hewitt. The rapid advance was only slowed for periodic, and vicious, punishment of captured mutineers or villages suspected of being sympathetic to the rebels.

As Barnard's force continued towards Delhi, Hewitt and his second in command, Brigadier Wilson, finally moved out from Meerut to meet it. After defeating a force of mutineers sent to impede their progress at Ghazi-ud-din-Nagar, Hewitt eventually met Barnard at Alipur on 7 June. Hewitt was then relieved on medical grounds and sent away to recuperate; he was never re-employed. On the following day the combined force marched down the main trunk road to Delhi and met a mutineer body of approximately 3000 at Badli-ki-Serai. The mutineers were dug in and supported by 12 artillery pieces. The artillery proved particularly effective, causing many British casualties. However, after heavy fighting, the mutineers were driven out of the position and fell back on Delhi. The British advanced to occupy the old cantonment area above the ridge overlooking Delhi. The position extended on the right to the house of Hindu Rao, a Maratha nobleman who had died in 1855, and on the left to the old signal station. It was from this position that all subsequent operations would be conducted against Delhi and the move onto the ridge on 8 June is generally accepted as the beginning of the so-called "Siege of Delhi".

Initial estimates of the garrison of Delhi upon the arrival of the British on the ridge vary wildly. Fortescue, in his history of the British Army, suggests that Barnard's force was initially outnumbered "at least twenty and possibly forty to one..." which is clearly a gross exaggeration for so early in the siege. Even the lower

figure of twenty to one would give the mutineer strength at around 52,000 based on Barnard's force of 2,600 effectives.[35] Christopher Hibbert, in his comprehensive history – *The Great Mutiny, India 1857*, (London 1980), suggests that the initial strength of the mutineers was around 7500[36], which would be a more sensible force ratio of three to one. These figures however are difficult to refine and are all based on estimation and extrapolation.

The combined strength of the native garrisons at Meerut and Delhi, assuming all of the sepoys mutinied and all went to Delhi, would still only amount to some 3,600 men. However, in the period before the arrival of the British on the ridge, troops from other stations arrived at Delhi almost daily as news spread of the outbreak at Meerut, and other units mutinied.

Taking even a conservative number of mutineers, and adding in civilian sympathisers, armed retainers, and religious zealots, it is certainly true to say that by 8 June the rebels in the city outnumbered the British force that arrived to besiege it by at least a factor of three to one and probably higher.

Whilst all this had been happening, trouble had continued to spread throughout Bengal. The British authorities were not idle during this period and the prompt actions of Sir John Lawrence, Chief Commissioner of the Punjab, ensured that no widespread repetition of the mutiny occurred in that province. In particular the disarming of native regiments, although unpopular with many officers, and in spite of

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[35] The Hon J W Fortescue, *History of the British Army*, 16 Volumes (London 1930), Vol. 13 p.269.
[36] Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny*.., p.281.

their protested loyalty, ensured that the only outbreaks in the Punjab were small and isolated affairs quickly dealt with by local European troops or police. It was in effect the security and stability of the Punjab that later allowed Lawrence to despatch troops to Delhi under the charismatic leadership of Brigadier General John Nicholson. However, despite Lawrence's efforts to secure the Punjab, he could do little to save Bengal and the North West provinces. Over the next two months they descended into anarchy with numerous small European garrisons or stations either being wiped out or occasionally holding their own against superior forces of mutineers whilst awaiting relief. Although British rule cannot be said to have ended, it was certainly in abeyance in Bengal, and the mutineers had virtually free rein across the region.

Meanwhile conditions for the British forces on the ridge proved unpleasant and stagnant. The ridge was not a particularly impressive natural feature. Rising sixty feet above the plain and just over two miles long, it was two hundred yards wide in the North before broadening to eight hundred yards at its Southern end. It straddled the route to the Punjab, whilst also forming a natural defensive rampart against any force advancing from the city.

For those on the ridge looking down upon Delhi it was obvious that re-taking the city would be a considerable undertaking. The defences, although old, were nevertheless formidable and in a reasonable state of repair. The city was encircled by a solid curtain wall twenty-five feet high and seven miles round. In front of the wall a deep wide ditch prevented direct assault. The wall was broken by ten gates, each one defended by a powerful bastion. Despite the actions of Lieutenant Willoughby on 11

May[37], the mutineers had ample supplies of ammunition and a large variety of artillery pieces, well served by native artillerymen. It was later discovered however that they were short of gunpowder and particularly sulphur to make more.

Including the non-sepoy forces present, the rebel strength within Delhi upon the arrival of the British may be estimated as anywhere between a minimum of 5,000 to a maximum of 15,000 men. Importantly, however, the one fact that is undisputed is that this number grew steadily after Barnard's arrival with the inability of the British properly to invest the city.

With only some 2000 infantry and no heavy guns at his disposal Barnard had quickly been talked out of an early assault on the city following an aborted dawn assault planned for 13 June. Despite the protests of some of his more adventurous officers, he decided to sit things out and await reinforcement. The decision was a controversial one and many believed that the city would fall to a direct and immediate assault using 'force majeure' hot on the heels of the victory at Badli-ki-Serai. Whilst this was unquestionably a possibility, it was by no means certain and the more cautious amongst Barnard's staff agreed with the general that an immediate assault, with little or no intelligence of the enemy, while bold, would nevertheless be folly.

As shall be seen, the mutineers within the city at this stage were totally disorganised and virtually leaderless. However, Barnard had no way of knowing this and could only be truly certain of the relative weakness of his own force. His only experience of the mutineers up to this point had been their disciplined and courageous

[37] Lieutenant George Willoughby led the party responsible for destroying the main magazine at Delhi when the garrison mutinied.

efforts at Badli-ki-Serai and it is not unreasonable to conclude that the sepoys would therefore be more than capable of defending Delhi.

However, with the benefit of hindsight, and knowing the state of the mutineers within Delhi, it is entirely possible that a sudden bold stroke might have succeeded. What is perhaps more important however, and ultimately must have been at the forefront of Barnard's thoughts, was the fact that a delay in capturing Delhi, though serious, would be far better than the repulse and defeat of the DFF. The DFF at this stage was the only sizeable British formation in the field holding and its defeat would have been catastrophic for British morale and subsequent operations. Quite apart from this, the DFF on the ridge, though not truly besieging Delhi, nevertheless ensured that thousands of mutineers and sympathisers within the city remained in place rather than spreading more chaos through Bengal. A defeat of the DFF would have released many rebels to join the forces at Cawnpore, Lucknow, or a host of other British stations fighting for survival. Ultimately the DFF and Barnard were in the unenviable position of not being able to win the "war" but certainly they could lose it.

With this in mind Barnard's decision is understandable and perfectly justifiable. However, it did commit his force to a static defence of the ridge until reinforcements arrived.

The initiative was therefore almost entirely handed over to the mutineers and the only actions fought were those to repel sepoy attacks on the British positions. By no means cowed by the British, the mutineers pressed home several attacks on the ridge and in one particular success destroyed the Bagpat bridge over which the British supply chain had to pass. The mutineer attacks were invariably simple frontal assaults which rarely displayed any clever tactical thought. However they were well staged

and disciplined with supporting artillery fire, and often accompanied by regimental bands playing British marching tunes! To all intents and purposes it was the small force on the ridge that was under siege and not Delhi.

Many junior officers blamed the lack of results on Barnard. He was seen as too old for the task and not suited for the command of such a force with so critical a task. Letters survive from officers who all complain of a lack of leadership or zeal, and indeed the early days of the Delhi Field Force revolved around individual actions by junior officers and NCO's doing what they deemed best in the absence of any general direction or instructions.[38] The camp at this point seemed to lack any cohesive plan for defence or action, with individual commanders often doing what they felt was best and asking their fellow officers for support when it was needed.

Barnard died of cholera on 5 July and was succeeded by General Sir Thomas Reed, who resigned the command within two weeks and handed over to Brigadier Wilson. Wilson accepted the command somewhat reluctantly and quickly came to the same conclusions as Barnard. However, despite his doubts, Wilson did bring some semblance of organisation to the camp. Arranging a coherent defence and properly laying out positions, piquets, and duty organisations, he radically transformed the disparate units on the ridge into a single effective force. The failings of organisation up to this point have generally been attributed to Barnard and his staff. However this is somewhat unfair and Fortescue identifies Barnard's main weakness as simply a lack of understanding about the "casual ways of Indian officers". Fortescue goes further and indicates his belief that Indian military operations were generally characterised by "carelessness" on the part of the officers and draws sharp distinction between the

[38] Examples of these views are expressed in the private letters of Kendall Coghill (Jun 1857), NAM collection, 7207-4-1 and 6609/139; Thomas Cadell (Jun and Jul 1857) NAM collection, 6609/133; and Charles Ewart (Jun 1857) NAM 7310-48. Even Archdale Wilson showed his frustration in his letters to his wife (Jun 1857). Wilson Papers, NAM collection, 6807-483.

abilities of officers fresh from the Crimea, such as Barnard, and those with experience of India alone.[39]

However, despite Wilson's best efforts at re-organisation he still could see no way of successfully assaulting and holding the city. Of the opinion that the storming of the city required a far larger force than he had available, he wrote to Sir John Lawrence on 18 July, copying the letter to the Governor General, "I have consulted with Colonel Baird Smith the Chief Engineer with the Force and we have both come to the conclusion that any attempt now to assault the city of Delhi must end in our defeat and disaster."[40]

Like Barnard and Reed before him, Wilson decided to wait for reinforcements. At this point the DFF was now operating under its fourth commander since it had begun its labours under Anson just seven weeks before. Those weeks had seen great turbulence throughout India and numerous outbreaks of mutiny in Bengal. Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the critical focus remained Delhi. Both the Governor General and Sir John Lawrence were convinced of this and in a letter of 23 July, prompted by Wilson's letter, Lawrence's secretary wrote:

It is obvious to the Chief Commissioner that we must maintain our position at Delhi at all risk. The present struggle must be fought out on that spot. To retreat would be fatal. The troops would be destroyed and even the Punjab would be invaded and forced into insurrection…if we fail at Delhi we can not hope to hold the Punjab. [41]

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[39] Fortescue, *History of.*, Vol. 13 p.298.
[40] Wilson Papers, MS letter from Wilson to Lawrence dated 18 Jul 1857, NAM collection, 5710/38.
[41] Wilson Papers, copy of MS letter from Lawrence's private secretary to secretary of Governor General dated 23 July 1857, NAM collection, 5710/38

Despite this endorsement of the importance of Wilson's task at Delhi, no major reinforcements were available.

Mutineers continued to pour into Delhi from all over Bengal. Most notably the 'Bareilly Brigade' under Bakht Khan had arrived at the end of June, significantly adding to the city's garrison. British reinforcements, although welcome, arrived only in a trickle that was barely enough to match losses from action and illness. However, Sikh troops from the Punjab and Gurkhas from Nepal did strengthen the British position. By the middle of July, the point at which Wilson wrote to Lawrence, British intelligence estimated the mutineer strength in Delhi at 30,000 (this figure was reduced to 20,000 by mid August due to casualties and desertions.)[42] The source of these figures was native spies slipping into Delhi and returning to their British masters. Although treated with some scepticism they were generally accepted by Wilson and his staff. These figures did not, however, tell the whole story, as they were based on mutineer sepoys and rarely took account of the many others assisting in the defence of the city. These included groups of armed retainers, native police and customs officers, released criminals, zealous youths, nationalists and the religious fanatics known as Ghazies.

It was nevertheless clear that a significant force numbering in the tens of thousands was defending the city. Indeed Field Marshal Sir Henry Wylie Norman

[42] This figure relied heavily on native spy reports from within the city. Once such report from a spy named Fuliah Mohammed Khan broke down the sepoy forces in a letter dated 13 August giving a total sepoy strength of 17,970. "Letters received from our spies in Delhi/Jul-Sept 1857", NAM collection, 6807/138.

who was present at Delhi in 1857 as a major, wrote in his excellent narrative of the siege[43], "...by the middle of August, the very lowest estimate of the numbers of insurgents was 30,000 men."[44]

As the spy reports gave the numbers of mutineers as 20,000 in the same period, this would suggest that up to 10,000 other "insurgents" were actively involved in the defence. Whilst the military effectiveness of these individuals is questionable their importance should not be overlooked. It does not take a great deal of training to man a static fortification and fire a musket, particularly when bolstered by regular troops on either side. Given time the rawest recruit can be turned into an effective soldier and the mutineers had no shortage of experienced NCO's to accomplish this.

Back on the ridge the advocates of early assault now agreed that the chance had passed and that any assault without reinforcement would be unwise and perhaps even disastrous.[45] Gloom and despondency overcame the camp and little was achieved other than the static defence of the ridge positions. The mutineers maintained their attacks on the ridge positions, and time and again were repulsed with heavy loss. Indeed on one particular occasion the attack was led by a native Indian woman who had become so enraged at the failure of the sepoys to dislodge the British she jeered them into re-attacking the position under her leadership. The woman was

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[43] Field Marshal Sir H W Norman, *Narrative of the Campaign of the Delhi Army*, (London 1858). This account has not only the advantage of personal experience and knowledge which was fresh in his mind but also gives some very astute observations on many aspects of operations around Delhi.

[44] Norman, *Narrative of..*, p. 20.

[45] This decision was reached at a council of war on 16 June. Barnard wrote of his misgivings, and those of his senior officers, in a letter to Sir John Lawrence on 18 Jun quoted by Kaye and Malleson, *History of..*, Vol II p. 404. Wilson also discussed the decision in a letter to his wife of 16 Jun. Wilson Papers, NAM collection, 6807-483.

subsequently captured and sent under escort to Meerut.[46] However, despite their failures these attacks invariably led to casualties that the British force could ill afford and every repulsed attack on the ridge weakened the force that would eventually have to storm the city.

The general feeling on the ridge changed dramatically with the arrival of a force from the Punjab on 14 August. In command was the enigmatic Brigadier General John Nicholson. Something of a living legend, Nicholson was an Irishman born in Dublin in 1821. Having joined the army at 15 he obtained a cadetship in the Bengal Army in 1839 and had remained in India. Nicholson saw action in Afghanistan and Ghazni before he was thirty and went on to distinguish himself at Gujerat during the second Sikh war. A notoriously arrogant and self-confident individual, he was nevertheless held in awe by his native troops, and, although less popular with his European contemporaries, Nicholson was respected as an intelligent and courageous officer. He went on to fill a variety of civil appointments between 1851 and 1856 and was working in the Punjab under Sir John Lawrence in May 1857[47].

On 22 June he had taken command of the Punjab Moveable Column, a mixed force of cavalry, infantry and artillery, formed after the mutiny at Meerut to impress the Punjab. He had already disarmed several native regiments before they could mutiny and fought a number of minor skirmishes. He had also intercepted a force of mutineers on their way to Delhi and fought successful actions at Trimmu Ghat on the

[46] This event is described in detail in a letter from Captain M S Hodson to his friend the Deputy Commissioner of Meerut dated 29 July 1857, MS letter, Papers of Captain M S Hodson, NAM collection, 5910/110.

[47] A study of Nicholson and his contemporaries is given in Charles Allen's book, *Soldier Sahibs*, London 2000).

river Ravi on 11 July and again on 16 July. Following this Nicholson was sent to join the British force at Delhi.

Upon his arrival Nicholson quickly threw himself into the problems of taking Delhi. Although without any official position on Wilson's staff he was nevertheless a seasoned and experienced officer who commanded a sizeable portion of the troops now on the ridge. Nicholson was not overly impressed with what he found nor did he think highly of Wilson whom he believed had unduly delayed operations already and might yet hesitate to storm the city. Shortly after his arrival Nicholson wrote to Lawrence:

Wilson says that we will assume the offensive on the arrival of the heavy guns. But he says it in an undecided kind of way which makes me doubt if he will do so if he is not kept up to the mark....He is not at all equal to the crisis, and I believe he feels it himself...[48]

It is clear however that Nicholson was the strong, confident leader that had been lacking from the beginning. A harsh man who detested the mutinous sepoys and was vehement and brutal in his punishment of captured mutineers, he nevertheless possessed the firmness and decision that were needed to meet the difficult circumstances that Wilson and the DFF found themselves in. Indeed Taylor's entry on Nicholson compares his leadership to that of Winston Churchill during the dark

[48] Capt L J Trotter, *The life of John Nicholson*, (London 1898), p. 275.

days of 1939.[49] While this may be a little generous, he nevertheless proved himself to have considerably more drive and confidence than Wilson, and undoubtedly it was Nicholson's pressure for an assault that steadied the wavering Wilson.

It was generally accepted, even by Nicholson, that the key to the assault was the arrival and bringing in to action of the British siege train.[50] As obvious as this was to the British on the ridge, so too was it apparent to the mutineers defending Delhi. A strong force was seen departing the city overnight on 23-24 August, almost certainly with the mission of intercepting the siege train. It was swiftly agreed that this force must be countered; and so on the morning of 25 August Nicholson left the ridge with a force of about two thousand, comprising cavalry, infantry and some light artillery. This force came upon the mutineers around 4 o'clock. British estimates put the enemy force at some six thousand.[51] Immediately going into action, Nicholson routed it and camped overnight, before returning to Delhi next day. Thus safeguarded from interception, the siege train finally arrived on 4 September. Consisting of 32 pieces of varying calibres, it brought the British siege artillery to a total strength of fifteen 24 pounders, twenty 18 pounders, and twenty-five mortars and howitzers.[52] The escort of two hundred men from the Eighth Foot joined the besiegers and was further supplemented by the arrival of the remainder of the first battalion of the 60th on 6 September. These arrivals brought the British force to around nine thousand men.

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[49] Taylor, *A Companion..*, p. 249.

[50] The story of the journey of the siege train is itself an adventure, recounted in the diary of its commander, Lieutenant J W Gray. NAM collection, 6807/201. Also of interest is the diary of William Tod Brown, one of the escorting soldiers. W T Brown, Personal diary, unreferenced, Cambridgeshire County Record Office.

[51] Fortescue, *A History..*, Vol. 13, p. 300.

[52] Fortescue, *A History..*, Vol. 13, p. 300.

Interestingly, and impressive though this force was, only about one third of its number was European.[53]

As well as this there remained an element of doubt about many of the native troops on the ridge. The Gurkhas and Nicholson's Irregulars were trusted implicitly but the loyalty of some of the others was questionable. As early as 9 July a serious attack on the ridge had allowed mutineer cavalry to penetrate into the British camp without detection by the picquet from the 9th Irregular Cavalry. Many believed the 9th Irregulars had at the very least turned a blind eye to the mutineers' advance and in his narrative Norman wrote:

The exact circumstances of the inroad of the cavalry into camp were never correctly ascertained but there seems little doubt that there was some treachery on the part of the picquet of the 9th Irregulars.[54]

Similarly two native lascars had been caught sabotaging British artillery ammunition in early August and put to death. Principally as a result of these two incidents a number of native troops were disarmed and used as orderlies. The 9th Irregulars were in fact sent back to Meerut such was the doubt over their loyalty.

It is clear therefore that, although the nominal strength of the British force was nine thousand, its combat effective force was considerably less.

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[53] Fortescue, *A History..*, Vol 13. p. 300. Actual numbers were 8748 consisting of 3317 British troops formed from 580 artillerymen, 443 cavalry and 2294 infantry. The remaining 5431 of the force was made up from native troops namely Sikh's, Gurkha's and some others from the Punjab Kashmir and Jhind.

[54] Norman, *Narrative of..*, p. 24.

At this juncture it became evident that this was likely to be the peak of British strength. Further reinforcements were unlikely and every day men were falling from sickness; the sick figure for the end of August alone was 2,368 non-effectives.[55] A delay now could only weaken the British force. Yet Wilson hesitated. He was, somewhat understandably, concerned less about a repulse than about the rapid dissolution and dispersal of his forces within the large and tightly packed city. The memory of how command had been lost of the army after the successful storming of Badajoz during the Napoleonic wars was still a powerful reminder of the dangers of assaults on cities after prolonged sieges. In the narrow streets and alleys of Delhi Wilson feared his troops could be matched piecemeal by the greater numbers of mutineers with both local knowledge and possibly support from the populace. If however Wilson hesitated, others did not. He was urged by many to attack and attack quickly. Wilson relented and agreed to an assault in a General Order of 07 September.[56] This would seem to confirm the generally held view that Wilson was only bolstered to attack by the strength of conviction from his staff.

In an interesting aside to this, Sir W Lee Warner wrote an article on Wilson some time after the siege, in 1911, in which he suggested that Wilson was hesitant to attack and pressured into it by his staff. Warner received correspondence from Field Marshal Lord Roberts of Kandahar, present in 1857 as a junior staff officer, agreeing with Warner's assessment. Roberts wrote that Wilson continued to wait for reinforcements that were not coming and was only persuaded to attack in the council of war held on 7 September. Roberts also wrote of Wilson, "The strain was

[55] Norman, *Narrative of..*, p. 33.
[56] General Order at Delhi dated 7 Sept 1857. Papers of Sir Archdale Wilson of Delhi, CSAS collection, Appendices, 2436-678.

tremendous, and there is no doubt he was quite broken down by the beginning of September."[57]

Indeed it is possible that Wilson was aware that Nicholson had privately suggested to Roberts that Wilson be replaced if he did not order an attack.[58]

Wilson however agreed to attack and batteries were sited between 08 and 11 September. All batteries were in action by the 11th and within another two days practicable breaches had been made in both the Kashmir and Water Bastions, and the Mori Bastion was in ruins. By 13 September it was agreed that the breaches were practicable for assault.

It is interesting to note that assault was considered practicable within only five days of the bringing into action of the siege batteries. This suggests that the defences of Delhi, formidable as they were to infantry and cavalry, proved no match for siege artillery and that the arrival of the siege guns, and indeed the decision to wait for them, was of great significance. Whilst the numbers of troops available had been an important issue to the British command, only the arrival of the siege train truly galvanised its efforts towards an assault. Within ten days of the train's arrival the British were in a position to attack despite having been on the ridge for three months beforehand.

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[57] Article, Sir W Lee-Warner, "Archdale Wilson, the Captor of Delhi", *Fortnightly Review* March 1913. Accompanying correspondence between Lord Roberts and Sir Lee-Warner. NAM collection, 5710/38

[58] Field Marshal F Roberts, *Letters written during the Indian Mutiny,* (London 1924), p.118. Wilson does not mention this in his own correspondence and it is possible he knew nothing of Nicholson's intentions. However, he must have been aware of the pressure from his senior officers to avoid any further delay in assaulting the city. Nicholson wrote to Lawrence that Wilson had made particular reference to the pressure applied by Baird Smith, going so far as to say that he (Wilson) disagreed with the plan of assault but had no other viable option and so had "...yielded to the urgent remonstrance's of the chief engineer." Allen, *Soldier Sahibs,* p.314.

Although hypothetical, it is nevertheless interesting to consider what the outcome would have been had in fact the siege train been successfully intercepted by the mutineers. Without heavy guns to breach the defences it is unlikely that any assault would have been possible. The effect that this would have had on the mutiny as a whole would have been significant and merits further study later.

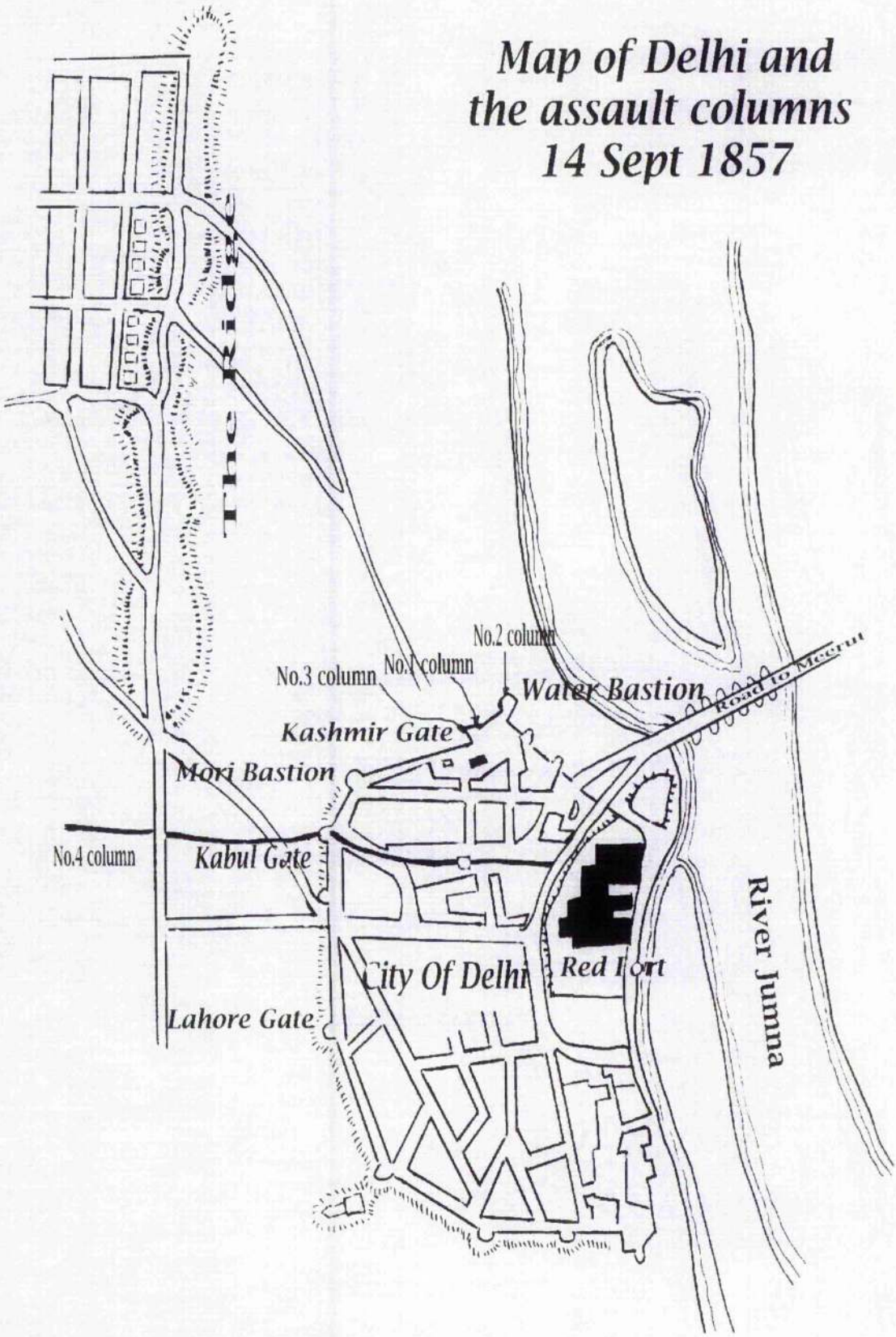
Suffice to say at this point the DFF prepared their assault for 14 September. Every man who could carry arms was committed with the entire force split into four columns and a reserve. The first column under Nicholson consisted of one thousand men to assault the Kashmir breach and once inside the city open the Lahore gate. The second under Brigadier General Jones of the 61st Regiment had 850 men for the Water Bastion on Nicholson's left. The third under Colonel Campbell of the 52nd Regiment had 950 men to enter the Kashmir gate, once it was blown open. The fourth column had 860 men under Colonel Reid. This force also had attached to it the 1200 men of the Kashmir contingent. Its role was to advance on the suburbs south of the ridge before entering the city by the Kabul gate, which would be opened from within by the other columns. The reserve was under the command of Brigadier General Longfield of the 8th Foot. He had 1000 infantry plus a force of 300 irregulars from the Jhind contingent.[59] All the assaulting columns were spearheaded by regular European troops under white officers. Native troops, whilst present in numbers, were relegated to supporting the spearheads. As Lieutenant Kendall Coghill, wrote to his brother shortly after the assault, "....we could not throw more than 2000 men into the

[59] Fortescue, *A History...* Vol. 13, pp. 303-304.

city and these were obliged to lead the storm as no Native would."[60]

The assault plan can be seen in detail at diagram (i) overleaf.

[60] Kendall Coghill private papers, NAM collection, 6609/139. Copy of MS Letter to Sir Jocelyn Coghill from Delhi dated 22 Sept 1857.


Map of Delhi and
the assault columns
14 Sept 1857
The Ridge
No.2 column
No.3 column
No.1 column
Water Bastion
Road to Meerut
Kashmir Gate
Mori Bastion
No.4 column
Kabul Gate
City Of Delhi
Red Fort
Lahore Gate
River Jumna

The ridge was defended by a handful of picquets, many drawn from the sick and wounded in the hospital. From this it became clear that the assault was an all or nothing effort. If it failed, then almost certainly the remnants of the force would need to retire and give up Delhi to the mutineers.

In charge of the first and largest column, Nicholson was effectively in overall command of the assault forces. Shortly after dawn he gave the order to advance on the Kashmir Bastion breach. Simultaneously Brigadier General Jones and his second column rushed the Water Bastion, whilst a team of engineers dodged heavy fire to lay charges at the Kashmir gate. Although suffering considerable casualties, the party was successful and Campbell's third column was able to enter through the gate and support Nicholson's troops who were now pressing through the breach at the Kashmir bastion.

As troops poured through the breaches the rebels retired in good order into the city. The British now began to spread out and make for their respective objectives. Troops from the 75th regiment under Captain Richard Barter pushed on for the Mori Bastion, whilst Nicholson continued towards the Lahore gate. Having suffered considerable casualties amongst both officers and men, Nicholson's column was significantly weakened by this time, and it quickly became pinned down at the mouth of the narrow alley leading to the Lahore gate. In quick succession two assaults were repulsed with heavy losses. At this second failure Nicholson's officers urged him to abandon his attempts but he was not to be dissuaded. Leaping into the alley in front of his men he urged them to follow him in a renewed attack. At this point he was shot and, mortally wounded, was carried back to the Kabul gate where Colonel Reid's

column had so far failed to arrive. Reid had delayed his advance waiting for some artillery pieces. He had then been forced into action by an impulsive advance of some of the native irregulars. The repulse of this attack, coupled with Reid's wounding, threw the column into confusion and, under heavy fire, it was not only unable to reach the Kabul gate but was at real risk of annihilation from a rebel counter-attack. Only the swift intervention of the Cavalry Brigade under Brigadier Hope Grant, and the assistance of a troop of horse artillery, saved the column. Both the column and its rescuers suffered heavy casualties leaving the force at the Kabul gate on its own.

By early afternoon the British held the Water, Kashmir, and Mori Bastions. The Kashmir gate had been blown in and the British also held the length of the city walls between the Water Bastion and the Kabul gate. The Kabul gate itself, though held, could not be reinforced from out-with the city because of the repulse of Reid's column. The Lahore Bastion and gate remained in the hands of the rebels, leaving the camp on the ridge susceptible to attack from the south. The bulk of the city to the south and east remained in the hands of a still overwhelming number of rebels, and British casualties amounted to 60 officers and nearly 1000 other ranks. Faced with this situation Wilson considered retiring and was only swayed from such action by vociferous objections, amongst them those of the dying Nicholson.

The street fighting and slow advance into the city continued over the next six days with heavy casualties on both sides. Despite a still overwhelming superiority in numbers and an often disorganised and disjointed British force in the city, no major coordinated counter-attack was mounted. Indeed early on the first evening of the assault many of the exhausted British troops were drunk, having indulged in the

supply of alcohol left in the vicinity of the gates and bastions. The likelihood of a counter-attack succeeding was considerable, and yet it never materialised. Discipline was eventually restored as Wilson ordered the confiscation and destruction of all stores of alcohol. On the sixth day the remaining rebel strongholds fell and the city was in British hands.

What was perhaps more significant was the fact that the fighting continued for so long after the assault and yet there was no concerted counter-attack. This suggests that rebel morale did not collapse with the breaching of the defences. The sepoys continued to fight bravely and with skill, but not as a single cohesive force in an organised counter-attack.

One of the accepted factors that have an effect on the outcome of combat has historically been 'Superiority of Numbers'.[61] In modern terminology this can be replaced by 'Concentration of Force'- one of the acknowledged principles of war laid down in the United Kingdom's current defence doctrine.[62] The methodology and principle can be applied to the situation at Delhi in 1857. Why was the British force not defeated by sheer force of numbers once within the city itself?

One possible answer that presents itself is an inability by the rebels to achieve a concentration of force against their attackers. The sepoys had weapons, training, discipline and courage as well as numbers; but they were never properly controlled or coordinated by an effective command chain. As a result the smaller, but concentrated, British force was able to defeat the rebels piecemeal. Under these conditions therefore, the British may well have outnumbered the pockets of resistance they met,

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[61] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War,* (London 1993) (Translated and reprinted), Book 3 Chapter 8.
[62] HMSO, *United Kingdom Defence Doctrine,* 2001 edition., (London 2001)

applying the principle of concentration of force, as they advanced into the city. In effect the British were able to achieve 'local' superiority of numbers in the series of actions that followed the initial assault. Certainly, following the initial assault, it would appear that the British acted in the absence of a coordinated defence, and the capture of Delhi was almost inevitable once troops actually got into the city.

What becomes apparent and what is worthy of further study is the possibility that the capture of Delhi was not only a result of British bravery, planning, discipline and firepower but equally had its roots in rebel failures of command, control, and leadership. It becomes appropriate then to look briefly at those who found themselves inside the walls of Delhi, looking out at the British on the ridge.

CHAPTER 3 – INSIDE DELHI

The European protagonists of the struggle wrote the majority of the source material concerning the mutiny, and little exists from native Indian sources. Of this limited material, even less gives an insight into affairs in Delhi. However, three key sources do exist, first the work of Charles Metcalfe, secondly the intelligence reports of the native spies working for the British, and finally the translated letters of Bahadur Shah and his court. Added to this must also be the book, *Dastambu* (A Posy of Flowers) (Delhi 1859?) written by Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, which chronicled his time inside the city during the siege of Delhi. The work was translated and may be read in, *Ghalib 1797-1869* Volume I *Life and Letters* (London 1969) by Ralph Russell and Khurshidul Islam.

The most useful source is Charles Metcalfe's, *Two native narratives of the Mutiny in Delhi* (London 1898), which translates the first hand accounts of Munshi Javanlal, the government official, and Mainnuddin Hassan Khan, the native policeman, who first appeared in Chapter one. Although, like Ghalib, both were pro-British, they nevertheless kept diaries of events that are considered as generally reliable. Indeed, despite his sympathies Hassan Khan actually maintained his position under the rebels and become the de facto Chief of Police during the siege. As such he maintained a close relationship with the rebel hierarchy and his observations are particularly relevant.

The reports of the native spies within the city are from a number of agents. Although some of the wilder reports are impossible to corroborate, in general they provide a valid, if sometimes over-creative, narrative of life in the city.

The material from Bahadur Shah and his court is limited and has been repeatedly used by scholars over the years but nevertheless does contain some useful information. Some material is also to be found in the transcripts and records of his subsequent trial.

As has been seen, Shah, either through pre-knowledge or intimidation and duress, had taken on the leadership of the mutineers and their cause shortly after their arrival on 11 May. Shah's eldest son Mirza was Commander in Chief of the mutineer forces and was tasked with the defence of Delhi and the defeat of the British. Importantly Shah took on the mantle of leading the mutiny as a whole and his letters to local rulers and rajahs, despatched in early May, asked for assistance not only in defending Delhi but also in ridding all of India of the British.

The panic and disorder in the city had led to many merchants closing their shops and hiding their supplies. Hungry sepoys looted without check as demands for food and pay went unanswered. In fact it was several days before any real order was imposed in the city.

A military committee of administration was founded to head up the defence and centralise mutineer efforts. It consisted of six military and four civilian members. From its inception it was a failure as few recognised its authority and its lack of influence was only marginally less than that of the CinC, Mirza. A man with no military experience, he was unpopular with the sepoys and a series of failed attacks on the ridge positions did nothing to dispel this. Mirza was eventually replaced by Shah's grandson, the equally ineffective Mirza Abu Bakr.

Despite these problems the mutineers were still able to mount effective and disciplined attacks, well supported with cavalry and artillery, on the ridge positions.[63] In practice the overall strategic command structure at Delhi, whilst in itself a manifest failure, was bolstered by the level of tactical experience present in the mutineer ranks. With the benefit of British training and equipment, they were more than capable of mounting a coordinated all arms attack at a tactical level. What was lacking, however, was someone with the ability to lead an army rather than an attack.

This situation continued until late June, when a large force of mutineers arrived at the city under the command of Bakht Khan. The Bareilly Brigade consisted of seven hundred cavalry, four regiments of infantry and supporting artillery. Khan was a native company officer with forty years' experience in the artillery. Confident and self-assured, he believed himself descended from the royal line of the Moghals and saw himself destined for greatness in an India free from the British. Upon his arrival he offered Shah his services as Commander of all the forces in the city. Shah, despondent at the lack of success, readily agreed and Khan remained in command as the CinC throughout the rest of the siege.

Ridiculed by the British as a fat and lazy junior officer who could barely mount a horse, Bakht Khan would not appear to have been much of an improvement on the previous CinC's and history has tended to devote little attention to his achievements in Delhi. However the significant difference between Khan and his predecessors was that Khan was in fact a soldier. Trained by the British he was

[63] The diary of Sir Charles Reid gives well written and descriptive accounts of many of the attacks made on the ridge positions during this period. Gen Sir C Reid, *Extracts from Letters and Notes Written during the siege of Delhi in 1857,* (London 1857), pp. 34-41. Wilson also discusses them in many of his letters to his wife between Jun and Aug 1857. Wilson Papers, NAM Collection 6807-483.

accustomed to the discipline and rigour of army life. He was also familiar with British military doctrine and ethos. To some extent, he understood the British and what they were capable of. However Khan suffered from the same disadvantage that all native officers endured. Regardless of ability and experience, the rise of native officers was capped by their European masters. This limited the level at which any native officer could command and thus no native was ever responsible for troops above company level. Even this was often at the end of many years of service, and it was not uncommon to find native officers in their fifties or sixties within the army. In effect the military system in India produced extremely experienced and respected native junior officers but provided no avenue for their further advancement. Thus native officers often excelled at small unit actions but had no grounding in the command of an army or of fighting in a pitched battle as a commander.

Whilst it is fair to say that tactically Khan achieved little, he was nevertheless the closest the mutineers ever came to having an effective military leader at Delhi. Hibbert provides a balanced view of Khan and points out that, as a soldier, he at least knew the value of discipline and a chain of command. Upon taking over as CinC, Khan quickly brought the rebel army to heel, quashing the looting and unrest that had racked the city. It may be no coincidence that one of the most serious attacks on the ridge was the penetration of the camp on 9 July, shortly after Khan's arrival, which had raised a question mark over the 9th Irregular Cavalry. It is not unreasonable to suggest that this change in tactics, away from simple frontal assaults, could be

attributable to Khan. Soorah Ali, one of the British spies inside Delhi reported in a letter of 28 July, "Everything about fighting is settled by consulting Bakht Khan…!"[64]

Ultimately, however, Khan could not provide the much-needed victory and his grasp over the mutineers weakened. In the final analysis Khan was not the effective general that was needed and he was unable to hold Delhi even against a numerically inferior force. Despite this he was able to retire from the city after its fall at the head of a substantial and disciplined force and continued to serve the mutineer cause well into 1858.

This represents a brief overview of the command structure within the city. Unable to fuse the political leadership with an effective military leadership, the mutineers desperately lacked the strategic overview of a supreme commander. Whilst tactically they were awash with experience and any number of small unit commanders and NCO's, they were totally devoid of any form of higher command experience.

But what of the morale and discipline of the sepoy defenders, and indeed the civilian population, of the city? Unquestionably there was some support for the mutineers from the civilian populace, not just of Delhi, but also in much of Bengal. The issue however is how widespread this support actually was. Certainly within the city we have seen that many civilians were unhappy with the arrival of the mutineers.

[64] Soorah Ali, MS letter dated 28 Jul 1857, "Letters received from our spies in Delhi", NAM Collection 6807/201.

However, equally the defenders' numbers were swelled by up to as many as 10,000 'insurgents' drawn from the civil population. Clearly then opinion was split between those quietly eager for the return of the British and those who embraced the mutiny.

The merchants of the city were less than forthcoming in their support as Munshi Jivanlal wrote:

Bankers and businessmen of all sorts had been called upon to contribute to the expenses of maintaining an army in Delhi; but the response had been very disappointing. Some of those subject to the levy could not be found when the tax inspectors called; others actually refused payment or bribed officials appointed to supervise the collection.[65]

From their arrival the mutineers had hounded Bahadur Shah with petitions and requests. Many refused to fight without pay and simply deserted the city after the opportunities for initial plunder had passed. Others abused the civilian population, looting and plundering on the pretext of searching for hidden Europeans. As Shah wrote in exasperation to Mirza on 27 June:

Not a day has elapsed since the arrival of the Army, and its taking up quarters in the City, that petitions from the towns-people have not been submitted, representing the excesses committed by numerous Infantry Sepoys.[66]

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[65] Jivanlal narrative, (Metcalfe), *Two native narratives...*,p 207.
[66] MS Letter from Shah to Mirza Mogul dated 27 Jun 1857 quoted by Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, p. 85.

The surrounding populace of the countryside was equally harassed as the petition of Syed Abdullah tried to relate to the King on 29 June:

The whole of the Autumnal crop... has been totally devastated... the very implements of Agriculture, such as ploughs, the wood-work on wells, have been all carried away, in plunder by the soldiers.[67]

This persistent theme of the mutineers' search for plunder and demands for pay is in itself interesting, and weakens the argument of a popular uprising in defence of religion. The questions that have been raised about the real motivations of the mutineers and the causes of the mutiny are again worthy of brief re-examination here. Why did the mutineers ransack the shops and property not just of Europeans but also of the native population? Equally the constant demands for pay and resolution of grievances seem at odds with the stated intentions of the mutineers. These issues appear somewhat out of place in the great struggle for freedom and defence of religion that supposedly drove the mutineers.

They would of course be out of place if the majority of the mutineers were actually the aggravated rebels that some historians would have us believe. The majority in fact found themselves in Delhi simply because 'everyone else' was there. The ringleaders of mutiny and insurrection had achieved their aims and now let the

[67] Parliamentary Papers, HC 1859 Vol. XVIII, p.111, "A Copy of the Evidence taken before the Court appointed for the trial of the King of Delhi", evidence p.10.

mutiny take its course. It is therefore fair to conclude that for the majority of these sepoys, personal gain and plunder were a higher personal priority than insurrection against the British.

Pay, allowances, and conditions of service, are fundamental issues to any professional army. In his thesis David makes this very point and goes on to suggest that the root cause of the mutiny lay far more with changes in these arrangements than in any threat to religion.[68]

However, despite this predisposition to plunder and personal gain the mutineers continued to fight and die at Delhi even after the successful assault of the DFF.

What then is the conclusion to be drawn from these actions? The majority of sepoys at Delhi were there because the rest of their regiments were there. Their bonds to their comrades overrode any great empathy for national or religious struggles. They acted as a group, taking the same risks and hoping for the same rewards. Obviously none were being paid any longer and so many looked to line their own pockets from whatever sources were available. The majority may not have known why they had ended up at Delhi but they did know that their future was bound to that of the mutiny as a whole. Their individual fortunes, and survival, rose or fell with the mutiny. Their best hope was that the mutiny would succeed in prompting a national uprising that would drive the British from India; and the best hope of that lay in the successful defence of Delhi. Hence they attacked the ridge and defended the city, not, as some would have us believe, purely from religious zeal or patriotism, but far more so from a

[68] David, *The Bengal Army..*,Chapter 5, and particularly pp.165-166.

driving force of personal interest. Their future was the mutiny, and the key to the mutiny was Delhi.

The motivation of the mutineers in Bengal is studied in some depth by David. He devotes considerable time and effort to this aspect of the mutiny and is convincing in his conclusion that the majority of mutineers were influenced more by grievances over pay and conditions than by religious fears. David suggests, and it is hard to disagree, that religious issues and others such as the cartridge question were manipulated to provoke mutiny in an army that was already unhappy about less heady issues.[69] This itself leads to the central issue of this question, namely 'the military mutiny' or 'the national war of independence' debate. To answer this question it is necessary to return to the civil population and its reaction to the mutiny.

There is no debate that the mutiny was accompanied by civil disturbances. The Indian historian, S B Chaudhuri, argues in his books, *Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies 1857-1859* (New Delhi 1957) and *Theories on the Indian Mutiny*(New Delhi 1959) that, far from playing a supporting role in the mutiny the civil unrest was in fact a key element in a national struggle for independence. He points out that many civil disturbances actually preceded troop mutinies and that the geographic scope of civil unrest was much wider than that of the military conflict. However his arguments are not entirely convincing, even though it is reasonable to suggest a common, tacit approval for the mutineers from the majority of the civil population. It is easy to see why many would sympathise with the **proclaimed** reasons for the mutiny. As Indians, either predominantly Muslim or Hindu, they

[69] David, *The Bengal army..*,pp.166-167, and pp.175, 177, 190, and 194-195.

could understand, and empathise with, a desperate act on the grounds of religious faith.

However, it must also be said that a great many Indians remained loyal and played no part in the mutiny. Chaudhuri himself acknowledges that there was no widespread response among the civil population of Bengal, the Punjab, or Bombay, to the mutiny[70] and he does not even mention unrest in Madras or Calcutta, the other two Presidencies of British India. Indeed, although he cites many outbreaks of civil unrest in Bengal, the majority were far away from the central administrative areas, the exceptions being Lucknow, in the recently annexed Kingdom of Oudh, and Agra. In fact the greatest example of widespread civil unrest was in Oudh, which Sen, as opposed to Chaudhuri, clearly differentiates as being separate from the mutiny because of its recent annexation and therefore obvious hostility to the British. Sen categorises the struggle in Oudh as a national uprising against a recent invader.[71]

Similarly many of the outbreaks of civil unrest were clearly ***a consequence*** of the breakdown in civil authority rather than a means to achieve it. The Indian historian H Chattopadhyay actually argues that there would have been no popular revolt if military mutiny had not occurred first. He goes on to suggest that such disturbances as there were, were regional events, and so by default cannot be considered as a national uprising.[72]

Indeed, when civil unrest flared up, it was often between warring natives rather than against any Europeans, and one can only conclude that many civil

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[70] Chaudhuri, *Civil Rebellion..*, pp. 203, 229 and 235.
[71] Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, pp. 411-413.
[72] H Chattopadhyay, *The Sepoy Mutiny 1857*, (Calcutta 1957).

disturbances simply took advantage of the situation rather than contributing to it. Alfred Lyall, a magistrate at Bulandshahr, wrote to his mother:

...the native population did not rise against the white man, but the moment they thought the white man was powerless they rose against each other, the rival castes and villages plundering and fighting in all directions...[73]

As the historian T R Holmes wrote:

...just as a general mutiny of the London police would be followed by a violent outburst of crime on the part of the London thieves and roughs, so would the talukdars, the dis possessed land-holders, the gujars and the budmashes of India have welcomed the first symptom of governmental weakness as a signal for gratifying their selfish instincts.[74]

Whilst this is a somewhat trite and over simplistic statement, it nevertheless makes the point that many were **taking advantage of the loss of control rather than contributing to it.** However, it must not be forgotten that there were many from the civil population who genuinely believed in the cause of the mutineers, and the question of civil unrest cannot simply be written off as a manifestation of the 'unruly' elements of a poor society. Most historians note the civil unrest factor, particularly, Eric Stokes in his book, *The Peasant Armed – The Indian Revolt of 1857*, (Cambridge

[73] MS letter from Lyall to his mother. Lyall papers OIOC – MSS.Eur.F 132/3.
[74] T R Holmes, *A History of the Indian Mutiny (and the disturbances which accompanied it among the civil population)* (London 1898), p. 560.

1986).[75] However most also agree that the civil unrest played a supporting role of the mutiny, and was largely as a **result** of an admittedly unhappy populace suddenly finding itself released from almost all civil control and authority.

Chaudhuri's work, whilst a useful source does at times tend toward a nationalistic jingoism[76] and it certainly flows from his earlier work, *Civil Disturbances during the British Rule of India (1765-1857)* (New Delhi1955).

Whilst it is clear that civil unrest occurred throughout many areas well into 1858, it did not, by Chaudhuri's own admission, really affect Bengal or therefore Delhi, and ultimately his argument of a national uprising rings somewhat hollow. Indeed the work of both R C Majumdar (Chaudhuri's teacher) and Sen reject this interpretation. They support the view of a disaffected people who, being generally sympathetic to the mutineer cause, took advantage of the breakdown in civil order. Both writers do however acknowledge that, after its initial outbreak, the mutiny grew to encompass a larger scale struggle encompassing some parts of the civil population motivated by a hatred of the British. Sen makes the important point that the fact that the rebels turned to the King of Delhi as a figurehead adds a political dimension to the mutiny. In his closing chapter he wrote:

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[75] Unfortunately Stokes' book was completed by another author and edited by C A Bayly. As a result, although the main chapters of the book give a useful insight, the absence of Stokes' own conclusions is disappointing.

[76] The work was commissioned by the government of India in 1957 to commemorate the uprising. In general the text is somewhat nationalistic and anti-British. In particular Chaudhuri takes great pains to connect the civil unrest in other parts of India, (particularly Oudh), with the military mutiny in Bengal to argue that this represented a national uprising against the British across India. He does not however offer any satisfactory argument to explain why this 'national' uprising was not also observed in the other presidencies of Madras or Bombay or indeed to any significant level in Bengal itself, the heart of the military mutiny.

What began as a fight for religion ended as a war of independence for there is not the slightest doubt that the rebels wanted to get rid of the alien government and restore the old order of which the King of Delhi was the rightful representative.[77]

This conclusion is somewhat sweeping. Whilst it is probably true of those actually engaged in the struggle, it ignores the fact that the majority of the population, and indeed the armies of the two other Presidencies, did not rise up against the British.

Unquestionably there were amongst the mutineers, and indeed the civil population, those who worked for a national war of independence and perhaps the sepoy mutiny was the first step in this grand undertaking. Certainly the nominal leaders throughout the revolt, Bahadur Shah, Nana Sahib and Tatya Tope amongst others, were all civilians who had been wronged or slighted by the British, and it is possible that some or all of them manipulated the sepoys to rebel hoping to encourage a more widespread civil insurrection. However the populace as a whole never rose in the manner envisaged and the mutiny remained essentially a military insurrection with civil unrest on its peripheries.

The ultimate answer to a question of national uprising is simple. Had the population engaged in a general uprising, how could they possibly have failed? Hundreds of millions of native civilians, backed by a trained and equipped army of sepoys, against several hundred thousand Europeans. At the start of the mutiny the Bengal army comprised 22,698 European troops against 118,663 native sepoys.[78]

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[77] Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, p. 411.
[78] MS Document, "Current Military Force Levels", Bengal Military Consultations 1856-1857, OIOC 2254-348.

This is a significant imbalance of forces. Taken in conjunction with the millions of Indian civilians, the mathematics of defeat are unquestionable. No amount of Nicholsons, Havelocks, or Lawrences could possibly have saved British India from a **general** uprising of the native population.

If we accept that the civil populace was split in its attitude towards the mutiny, it is now possible to return in more detail to Delhi.

One would expect that the actions of the mutineers in the city would have turned the undecided against them. The refusal to pay levies for the army and the deliberate acts of sabotage bear this out.[79] In a series of letters between 11 and 13 August Soorah Ali reported numerous incidents of unrest in the city and the sepoys' outright disobedience of the orders of Shah.[80] More startling, he reported that the King wished to negotiate with the British for the surrender of the city and was only prevented from this course of action by the mutineers.[81]

Other factors were however also at work. The defeat of the force sent to intercept the siege train sealed the fate of the city and it became obvious that an assault would eventually take place. Work to upgrade and repair the defences was stepped up, but, despite the thousands in the city, manpower was found to be lacking. In a report on the state of defences at the Kashmir and Kabul gates, Soorah Ali wrote

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[79] Discussed briefly in Chapter 1 of this thesis.
[80] MS Letters from Soorah Ali dated 11-13 Aug, "Letters received...",NAM Collection, 6807/201.
[81] There is compelling circumstantial evidence that this story was true. Secret negotiations between Shah and the British are mentioned by several sources. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven,* discusses these negotiations at p. 96 whilst Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny,* discusses them in his appendix notes and in particular quotes from the National Archives of India, FDSC NAI 236 and 342.

on 12 September, " ...all the poor people, both Hindu and Mussulman, whether of high caste or low caste, are forced to labour in making them..."[82]

It is clear that Delhi was not a traditional city of the besieged where soldier and civilian alike worked to keep out a common enemy. The city was divided and by September many inside had become disillusioned with the mutiny. We have already considered the military failings of the defence but clearly the civil issue had its part to play. Poor morale and lacklustre support from the native population would certainly have had an effect on the sepoys. Why risk their lives to defend a city that has been, at least partly, reluctant to help itself? Why defend a King who many believed was making secret deals with the British?

Perhaps the simple truth is that by the day of the assault the sepoys had lost their zeal, if indeed it had ever existed, to defend Delhi and Shah. All that remained once the British penetrated the city were the close bonds between the men themselves, coupled with the fear of retribution that the victorious British would bring with them. Beyond this point all that the sepoys would fight for was what soldiers often fight for the hardest; each other. That alone was not enough to hold Delhi.

[82] MS letter from Soorah Ali dated 12 Sep, "Letters received...", NAM Collection, 6807/201.

CHAPTER 4 – A QUESTION OF QUALITY

The events at Delhi ultimately give rise to one of the central questions of this study. How did the DFF defeat a numerically superior mutineer force defending well-prepared and fortified positions? The DFF did not utilise some clever strategy or new weapon. Nor did they deceive their opponents or overwhelm them with force. This then suggests that the victory became a question of the quality and tactics of the opposing sides. Whilst it is relatively simple to analyse the tactics used, quality is a more difficult factor to assess. What factor was the critical one- leadership, equipment, training, or perhaps just the men themselves? Equally, what of morale, religious zeal, patriotism, and the logistics and organisation of the two forces? Each of these areas is worthy of study.

Looking at these factors individually it is first prudent to eliminate, or at least reduce the significance of, those that applied equally to both sides. Both the native troops of the EIC and the European troops of the EIC and Royal Regiments were broadly speaking equipped and trained along similar lines. All troops were officered at some level by white officers trained in England in European tactics, methods and drill. Native officers, though experienced soldiers, rarely rose above the rank of junior officer and had no experience of leading or manoeuvring a large body of troops. Native troops used the same muskets and cannon as their white counterparts; they practised the same formations and abided by the same regulations. This approach had, broadly speaking, served them well and led to a series of victories, which secured India for the EIC and Britain. Between 1757 and 1849 the sepoy armies had in succession beaten the French and Bengal Armies (1757-1760), the army of Mysore (1792-1798), the Maratha Confederacy (1803 –1805 and 1817-1818), and

annexed or subdued Nepal (1815), lower Burma (1824-1825), and the Scinde Amirs (1843). Indeed the superiority of the sepoy went largely unchallenged until the Sikh wars of the 1840s.

Morale

Turning to morale and religious zeal, at Delhi at least, both these factors were initially weighted towards the mutineers. They had thrown off the British yoke, seized Delhi, and thousands had flocked to their cause. The last of the Moghal Emperors had proclaimed his leadership, and Hindu and Muslim were fighting together against the British.

This point alone clearly indicated the nature of the opposition to the British. If Muslim and Hindu were prepared to put aside their differences to fight a common enemy, then the mutineers posed a serious threat to all of British India. This was clear to both native and British leaders alike and the proclamations and letters of Shah in Delhi, calling on Muslims and Hindu to rise together against the British, were perhaps some of his more potent contributions to the mutineer cause.

Conversely the British on the ridge were poorly equipped for the Indian summer, heavily outnumbered, and falling from sickness and disease. They appeared to have been set an impossible task and every report they received told of further massacres of British civilians or troops by mutineers. The British were engaged in a fight for survival not just for British India but also for themselves. If the mutiny were successful, then Europeans throughout India would find themselves surrounded and vastly outnumbered in a country that had already shown itself willing to put entire European families to the sword. It is reasonable to suggest then that the British on the ridge saw themselves fighting for survival, far more so than the 'besieged' mutineers

in Delhi. As Wilson wrote to his wife before Barnard's death, "Instead of being besiegers we are besieged, with a fair prospect of being starved out...These rascals are so persevering and systematic in their attacks that we are getting in a precarious situation."[83]

These are not the words of a confident man and it is reasonable to conclude that morale on the ridge was less buoyant than that in the city during the initial stages of the siege. Captain Richard Barter wrote, "The hearts of many failed at this time. I heard several say that we should never take the city and that it was only a question of time before we should all perish..."[84]

However this despondency changed over time as reinforcements arrived and the mutineers became disheartened through trouble in the city and through their failure to press home a successful attack on the ridge.

The arrival of Nicholson, and later the siege train, were significant not only for their positive effect on British morale but also for their negative effect on the mutineers. Reinforcements to the ridge also carried with them details of the massacres of European civilians most notably at Cawnpore,[85] and it is not unreasonable to suggest that the mutineers' zeal was more than matched by a British

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[83] MS letter from Wilson to his wife dated 17 Jul 1857. Wilson Papers, NAM Collection 6807-483.
[84] Memoirs of Captain Richard Barter, quoted by Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny*, p. 288.
[85] Cawnpore was the scene of some of the worst events in the Mutiny. The garrison, under the command of Major General H M Wheeler had initially held out against the mutineers but agreed to surrender on the promise of safe passage to Allahabad by boat. At the river the party, including the garrison families, was ambushed and almost wiped out. Worse followed on 16 July when the mutineers murdered some 200 women and children who were being held prisoner at the approach of a British force under General Havelock. The butchery of the bodies and subsequent tossing of them down a well compounded the crime. Events at Cawnpore were used time and again to justify the severity of punishment meted out to the mutineers.

desire for revenge against these savage murderers.[86] Lieutenant Thomas Cadell wrote to his sister, "The 'Mild Hindoo', with his friend the Mussulman, is the lowest brute God ever gave a soul to....I fear you will think me a cruel wretch for using this language but I assure you I only share the feelings of everyone in camp."[87]

Religion

The British soldier in modern times has rarely been known for his religious zeal on the battlefield.[88] Certainly one would never suggest that the average British soldier of the Victorian era was particularly pious or religious in his attitudes or views. However he did serve a society that was strongly associated with these attitudes and views. Victorian Britain considered itself a civilised and Christian society. Many considered it a duty to take forward the Christian beliefs of Victorian Britain to the rest of the world, whether invited or not. As a result, although the army itself was not a particularly religious organisation, it was driven to operate, support and if necessary defend, the morals and ideas of Christian society. The British soldier would not charge into battle yelling religious chants or slogans, as his Muslim or Hindu opponent did. However he might have been committed to battle because of a sense of religious indignation or to right some perceived wrong against the principles of Victorian society.

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[86] Fortescue, *History of the British Army,* (Vol. 13 p.285). He discusses the routeing of troops through Cawnpore and the effect the scenes there had on them. The grisly reminders of what occurred were purposely left to be shown to newly arrived troops to heighten their thirst for revenge and justice.

[87] MS Letter, dated June 1857 (day illegible), Papers of Lt Thomas Cadell, NAM collection 6609/139.

[88] Olive Anderson provides an interesting insight into Christian Faith and armies in her article, "The growth of Christian Militarism in mid-Victorian Britain", *English Historical Review* 1971 Vol 86 pp.46-72.

Conversely the mutineers were motivated, according to many historians, to mutiny in defence of their religion. The acts committed by them were supposedly part of a 'holy war' against Christians and in defence of the native Hindu and Muslim religions. Certainly the faith and belief of the sepoy were part of his 'fighting persona', far more so than for his British opponent. Equally a strong belief in an afterlife or higher plane of existence could well give a native soldier a boost to his courage; but this could also be said to be true of a Christian soldier.

However, as has already been discussed, and as David has suggested, the issue of religion has been given more importance than it warrants. Whilst it is true that religion was undoubtedly an important factor to the sepoy, the mutiny was not simply about religious faith.

Man for man, the sepoy ranks held far more practising Hindus and Muslims than the British ranks held devout Christians. The British soldier, generally speaking, was not motivated by religious beliefs or ideals in the same way as the native sepoy may have been. However he could be driven to a higher level of performance if he believed himself to be 'avenging' some wrong, particularly one committed against the weak or vulnerable of his society, his women and children. Equally the death or abuse of his fellow soldiers could spur him on to seek retribution and the British soldier was a formidable enemy when seeking revenge. The savagery of the British troops who sacked Kabul in 1842 or Multan in 1849 are just two such examples. Both events were orchestrated specifically as punishment and retribution. Kabul was in retaliation for the destruction of Elphinstone's army[89] and to serve as a warning to

[89] On 6 January 1842 the British evacuated Kabul believing it to be indefensible in forthcoming hostilities. A force of 690 British infantry, 2840 native infantry and 970 native cavalry escorted a convoy of British families and dependants out of the city to return to India. With the exception of a single officer the Afghan tribesmen wiped out the entire column over the next 7 days.

the Afghan tribes against further insurrection. Whilst Multan was a punishment aimed at the mutinous Sikhs of the EIC's own army who had revolted against them.

In the case of the mutiny the 'wrongs' that the British soldier saw himself avenging were the atrocities committed against European women and children. This was a use of 'terror' as a tactic that elevated the mutiny closer to a state of 'total war' than perhaps has been previously realised. At first glance it proved counter-productive, and the savagery of the atrocities was perhaps one of the greatest errors the mutineers made throughout the campaign. The potential strength of the religious fervour of the mutineers and their followers was an important factor for the mutineer cause. Given time and properly handled, it could have provided the avenue to a wider rising of the population, but its potency was negated by the barbarity of a handful of insurgents. Outrages against women and children not only roused the British soldier to a terrible thirst for vengeance but also shocked the majority of Hindus and Muslims who, whilst willing to take up arms for their faith, were not prepared to commit atrocities against women and children. There are many accounts of sepoys and native servants protecting their European masters, providing for their safe passage, before then joining the mutineers themselves. Several of the Europeans who escaped from Delhi did so only because they received help from native Indians or sepoys. This even occurred collectively when units mutinied yet safeguarded their officers and their families. Such was the case at Moradabad, Sleemanabad, Chittagong, and Damoh, to name just four stations where troops mutinied.[90] Admittedly these tended to be lesser stations where it is likely that the small native garrisons had forged a closer relationship with the European residents; however it demonstrates that not everyone who rose against the British was intent on murder.

[90] Taylor, *A Companion..*,pp. 226, 311, 83, 97.

Atrocities and the use of 'terror' as a tactic

It would however be remiss not to mention first the quest for vengeance that led to similar atrocities by British forces operating in India. It is also true to say that the scale and circumstances of many of the atrocities committed by both sides were exaggerated for each side's own purposes and support.

The issue of the use of 'terror' as a tactic by both sides is an interesting one and worthy of consideration. In European warfare the use of force against civilian populations was not considered appropriate within the accepted rules of war. Whilst there are examples of the sacking of towns or the execution of civilians from Europe they were the exception to the rule.

However in colonial warfare it is possible to identify a different approach to warfare, perhaps devolved from an institutionalised racism within the forces involved. It was often easier to justify harsh actions against enemies less developed or seen as more savage than your own forces. What would never have been acceptable against fellow Europeans was acceptable against natives or savages.[91] The British had never used the old Moghal practice of blowing men from cannon as a punishment against

[91] There are many examples of the harsh and brutal tactics often employed by European forces fighting non-European indigenous natives. In the 18th century when European exploration and colonisation were arguably at their peak, examples include the genocidal campaigns of Russian forces against the Itelmen and Koryaks in Kamchatka (1706, 1731, 1741, and 1745-56); the French extermination of the Natchez tribe of North American native Indians (1729-31); the British campaign against the Cherokee tribe (1763-64); and the complete elimination of the South American Paiagua tribe by Portuguese forces in the 1780's. Equally the 19th century yields further examples, in particular of British colonial warfare, with examples such as the very poor and often underhand treatment meted out to the Maori tribes of New Zealand during the Maori Wars (1843-48) and the vicious fighting and subsequent exploitation of the Kaffirs in Africa during the Kaffir Wars (1811-12, 1818-19, 1834-35, 1846-47 and 1850-53). All of these actions or campaigns were driven largely by ambitions of commercial and colonial gain. They typify the apparent lack of regard paid by the European powers to indigenous natives or 'savages', and their cultures, societies and territorial claims. Details of all these campaigns and actions may be found in B Farwell, *Queen Victoria's Little Wars* (London 1973), (Chapters 1 and 2), Holmes, *Redcoat..*, (Chapter 6), and in J Black, *War and the World- Military Power and the fate of continents*, (Yale 1998).

white troops but it was resurrected and used against captured mutineers regularly during the mutiny. Mutiny was a capital crime in the British Armed Forces, however execution was invariably by hanging or firing squad. It only followed a rigorous investigation, trial, and subsequent conviction of those involved. Often it was only the ringleaders who were executed and the remainder given lesser sentences of transportation or flogging.

In India during the mutiny, hanging was essentially routine for anyone suspected of involvement in the uprising. Blowing from cannon was for those identified in the murder of Europeans or other atrocities. Trials, if conducted, were brief and summary with no real suggestion of due process or legal defence.

The brutal methods of Brigadier General James Neill are worthy of particular note. His advance through central India was marked by a swathe of burned villages, destroyed fields, and hanged men. Prisoners were often made to lick a portion of blood stained floors where Europeans had allegedly been murdered before they themselves were executed. Neill exacted vengeance upon an often bewildered populace whose guilt was frequently in question. Sir George Campbell wrote of Neill, "He executes vengeance on 'all who had taken an active part in the Mutiny'...I can never forgive Neill for his very bloody work."[92]

Admittedly Neill was suppressing a rebellion not fighting a war, but even so his actions, often against a civil population, would have branded him at best a pillager and at worst a murderer, had they been carried out in Europe. Yet in Britain he was an avenging hero against the mutineer and native Indian menace. Certainly there was

[92] Sir G Campbell, *Memories of my Indian Career*, (London 1893), pp. 281-282.

a demand, perhaps not unreasonably, for vengeance against the mutineers. Even so Neill's methods, and to a lesser degree those of his fellow commanders, identify the critically important point that **colonial warfare against native enemies and European warfare between standing armies were fought very differently.**

Colonial warfare was waged against an entire people rather than their army; operations had to defeat not just military forces but also indigenous cultures and beliefs. By their very nature therefore colonial armies had a far greater impact on the civil population than armies in Europe did.

During the 1840's and early 1850's on the North West Frontier and Afghanistan there was a clear policy of making bold statements - punishment for any infraction, retribution for any loss. The burning of villages to 'make a point' was a common retaliation for the cruel treatment meted out to captured Europeans and the viciousness of this guerrilla style warfare far exceeded anything seen on a European battlefield. Outnumbered in a potentially hostile land small British forces made bold statements and harsh warnings to cow the populace. Villages were razed, offenders hanged, and land or property was seized to allow British justice to be seen both as swift and as a deterrent against further crimes.

General Pollock and his Army of Retribution[93] were the largest and most obvious example of this policy however many smaller examples exist. Following the First Sikh war, partly as punishment and partly to pay for the war, the Sikh controlled territory of Kashmir, with its predominantly Muslim population, was sold to a Hindu. Similarly Harry Lumsden and the Corps of Guides in Peshawar regularly featured in

[93] Major General Sir George Pollock led the punitive expedition to recapture Kabul and subdue the Afghans after the destruction of Elphinstone's force. His 'Army of Retribution' as it came to be known treated the Afghans particularly harshly before finally capturing and sacking Kabul in 1842. Allen, *Soldier Sahibs*, pp. 43-50.

punitive expeditions against villages for non-payment of taxes or offences against British property, citizens or interests.[94]

Political officers and administrators were strong believers in the 'firm but fair' rule of British law. At times this flew in the face of local, and far older, native precedents and understandings. The murder of Lieutenants Van Agnew and Anderson[95]at Multan in 1848 escalated into the Sikh uprising, precipitating the second Sikh war. This led to the annexation of the Punjab in 1849, ostensibly as punishment and security against further insurrection. The consolidation of the frontier that followed continued to see bold statements made by the British. One example was the story of John Nicholson riding alone into the village of a known bandit to arrest him. In the subsequent sword fight Nicholson killed the man and cut off his head. The head was then displayed in Nicholson's office for all the local headmen who visited to see.[96] Similarly when Colonel Frederick Malleson was murdered in 1853 his assailant was caught, tried and hanged for the offence, all of which was perfectly reasonable; however the body was then sown into a pigskin upon the orders of Sir John Lawrence, Henry's brother. This was an act wholly offensive to Muslims as it was certain to block the passage of the dead man into paradise.[97]

The British then were no strangers to the use of 'terror' in their dealings with native populations. However what is particular about the mutiny is the scale and scope of retribution carried out by the British. The murder of a British soldier on the frontier would be seen as an offence and the perpetrators brought to justice. However the murder of the same soldier's family would be seen as a mortal sin against everything that Victorian Britain stood for. As one English language Indian

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94 Allen, *Soldier Sahibs,* Chapter 4.
95 For an account see Allen, *Soldier Sahibs*, pp. 146-150.
96 Allen, *Soldier Sahibs,* p.217.
97 Allen, *Soldier Sahibs,* pp.225-226.

newspaper columnist wrote (about Canning and his 'Clemency' Resolution of 31 July 1857)[98]:

...the Government of India...allows the blood of English and Christian subjects of Her Majesty to flow in torrents, and their wives, sisters and daughters to be outraged and dishonoured without retribution. [99]

Even Her Majesty Queen Victoria, though disconcerted about the apparent indiscriminate retribution being waged by British troops in India felt that this:

....came from the horror produced by the unspeakable atrocities perpetrated against the innocent women & children which really makes one's blood run cold. For the perpetrators of these awful horrors no punishment can be severe enough...[100]

This goes a long way toward explaining the large scale of retribution inflicted by the British and perhaps it was true to say that in the view of many, such as Neill, 'no punishment' really was 'severe enough' for the mutineers.

Undoubtedly many of the reprisals conducted were against genuine mutineers or sympathisers and it should not be taken that the British wantonly destroyed everything native; however it is abundantly clear that many natives executed in this period, and many villages destroyed, were as the result of nothing more than a 'gut feeling' on the part of commanders advancing through Bengal.

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[98] Canning's resolution attempted to dampen the widespread retribution being taken against native Indians suspected of mutiny or rebellion by setting down guidelines for investigation, trial and offering amnesty for those sepoys proved not to have been involved in the mutiny. It earned him the somewhat unfair, but lasting, epithet of 'Clemency Canning'.

[99] J S M David, *The Indian Mutiny*, (London 2002) pp.237-238.

[100] Letter from HM Queen Victoria to Lord Canning quoted by David, *The Indian Mutiny* p.239.

It is now appropriate to return to the atrocities committed by the mutineers and their use of terror. As alluded to earlier it is possible to suggest a different argument from the accepted views of the mutineer atrocities being the random actions of a minority who weakened the mutineer cause.

There were two distinct types of atrocity: First the seemingly random and spontaneous murders that accompanied the outbreaks, and second, the clearly defined command decision to slaughter the Europeans at Cawnpore **after** having negotiated their surrender. In each case the mutineers appeared to gain no advantage for their cause, in fact quite the reverse. So were these events merely born of an overpowering and illogical hatred of the British or was there another reason?

It has already been suggested that not all the sepoys were openly ready to mutiny and that many still supported their European masters. Equally, sepoy mutinies in the past over pay and conditions had on the whole been bloodless affairs more akin to strikes than mutinies. If the small cadre of ringleaders were attempting to spark a mutiny that would develop into a war of independence across India, how were they to make this mutiny different from previous uprisings? It was necessary to limit the opportunities for the sepoys to back out or settle their differences without bloodshed. The committing of atrocities against European women and children guaranteed a strong response from the British. It alienated the sepoys and every sepoy became guilty by association. It gave the British no choice but to treat all sepoy units with suspicion and many units which showed no signs of mutiny were disarmed as a precaution throughout not just Bengal but also Bombay, Madras and the Punjab. Equally those that had already mutinied had no way back into the British fold.

Atrocities demonised the sepoys in a way simple disobedience and mutiny could never have achieved. The sepoys knew they would be hunted down and executed for these collective crimes and the majority of sepoys had but one choice, defeat the British or be caught, tried and executed by them. As an editorial in The Times (London) newspaper stated, when talking of atrocities of which at the time no actual evidence was available:

> We cannot print these narratives, they are too foul for publication. We should have to speak of families murdered in cold blood, and murder was mercy! Of the violation of English ladies in the presence of their husbands, of their parents, of their children, and then, but not till then, of their assassination.....These ruffians must be made to feel the consequences to themselves of the wrath which they have provoked. We are prepared to support our officers and soldiers in the discharge of their duty if they have retaliated upon these monsters according to the measure of their offences....[101]

The possibility that atrocities were committed expressly for the purpose of collectively incriminating the sepoys begs an obvious question. Were the atrocities at Meerut and Delhi, and the events of Cawnpore, really separate events or actually part of an orchestrated plan? Were the murders really as spontaneous as they appeared or were they planned to force the sepoys to remain loyal to the mutiny? As James writes, "...murdering Europeans made them men apart, cut off for ever from any chance of reconciliation and mercy. There was only one way forward: to fight and find friends."[102]

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[101] Editorial, *The Times*, London Ed, August 6 1857.
[102] James, *Raj*, p.239.

Although undoubtedly mutineers committed several of the murders at Meerut and Delhi, many contemporary accounts cite the local badmashes and religious fanatics as the main culprits. Indeed the accounts of murders, looting and atrocities at both Delhi and Meerut are significant for their very **lack** of mention of mutineers. Hibbert details the murders of Mrs Chambers by a Muslim butcher; Mrs Macdonald and Mrs Dawson by an angry 'mob'; whilst at Delhi he details many deaths at the hands of 'the mob' or of various civilian individuals. Notably, Hibbert is most precise in his identification of mutineers when they are directly involved and yet they rarely feature in the accounts. Similarly, Hurmat Khan, a professional gaol flogger, was instrumental in the mutiny of the 9th Cavalry at Sialkot and personally responsible for the murder of the Hunter family, including an infant. Khan killed them after the mutineers with him refused to commit the deed themselves.[103] At Fatehpur Assistant Surgeon A F Bradshaw wrote about a conversation he overheard in December 1857 between Sir W H Russell and the Chief of Police Major Bruce. The two men were discussing the massacre at Cawnpore and Bradshaw wrote:

I think the result which will be published will prove that the sepoys have been considerably maligned. In a great many of the atrocities attributed to the sepoys the budmashes (scoundrels criminal etc) released from the gaols were the sole actors.[104]

Equally at Delhi the servants of Bahadur Shah feature prominently in the murders of Captain Douglas and a number of European women and children.[105]

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[103] Taylor, *A Companion..*, p.156.
[104] MS Letter from Bradshaw to unknown recipient dated 10 Dec 1857. Bradshaw papers, NAM Collection.
[105] Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny*, pp.83-88 and 95-99.

It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the majority of sepoys, although unquestionably guilty of mutiny and riot, probably had less to do with the initial slaughter of Europeans, which appears to have been carried out by 'mob' elements drawn from the civil population in concert with a handful of mutineers.[106] It is possible to see once again the influence and actions of a small group of ringleaders who actively encouraged the murder of Europeans, thereby forcing the bulk of the sepoys to support the mutiny. The placards posted in the cities at Meerut and Lucknow encouraging Muslims to rise and slaughter the 'firinghis', and the multitude of secret meetings and conspiracy theories aired at Agra and Calcutta, are indicative of at least some rudimentary organisation to rouse the more troublesome elements of the civil population to violent insurrection.[107]

Certainly, this argument that individuals were tied to the mutiny by associating them with atrocities could be applied to the very deliberate execution of the fifty or so European women and children taken prisoner at Delhi. They had been captured on 11 May. On 16 May they were executed en masse in the presence of Shah and his family. As with Captain Douglas and the Europeans at the Red Fort, the King's retainers committed the murders and none of the sepoys took part.[108] Although the event was allegedly carried out at the instigation of the original mutineers, this is largely unimportant. What is more significant is the presence of Shah and his family, which can be seen at the very least as acquiescence and at worst as collusion. From this point on Shah was irrevocably tied to the mutiny in the same way as many sepoys. From this perspective, then, the use of terror could actually be seen as a

[106] Accounts of the outbreaks at Meerut and Delhi such as Sir Henry Greathed and Charles Metcalfe's, as well as Palmer's description of events at Meerut are most specific in their descriptions of the part played by the rioters from the bazaars and the badmashes, religious fanatics, and released jail inmates.
[107] Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny*, pp. 81, 154, and 221.

deliberate ploy to **broaden** the mutiny and **increase** its power base. Guilt by association ensured the loyalty of the mutineers, and of many civilians, after the initial murders of Europeans left them with no other options.

Either way it is clear that both sides used 'terror' tactics for their own purposes. The relative success of the policies is more difficult to analyse. From the British perspective the countryside did not rise in general rebellion, so the policy may have worked. Interestingly, although there were isolated examples such as at Bareilly, there were few other stations where the brutal and widespread viciousness of the civil populations of Meerut or Delhi was repeated. There were certainly rioting and looting, as well as direct action against European officers and troops, at stations such as Gwalior, Lucknow and Dinapore; but there were fewer incidents of widespread butchery of women and children. Of course many Europeans were still murdered in isolated outstations and smaller settlements by various elements, not least of all mutineer sepoys, but rarely did these events match the severity of Meerut or Delhi.

Perhaps this is indicative of the lack of the ringleaders who were needed to turn a general dislike and distrust of the British into the willingness to kill that was seen at Meerut, Delhi and Cawnpore.

It has already been argued that the bulk of the civil population had no intention of rising, and, although perhaps unhappy with their lot, they were in no way ready to murder European families. Perhaps then it can be argued that, whilst the British policy of retribution and warning can be seen to have worked in cowing the

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[108] Account of Mrs Allwell, quoted by Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny*, pp.94-95.

population, their punitive actions against the civil population are hard to justify, unnecessarily harsh and far too generic.

From the mutineer perspective the backlash against them and their cause was counter productive but conversely many more mutineers remained fighting for longer than any other previous mutiny of Indian troops. Similarly the mutineer atrocities provoked the British into the harsh treatment of the civil population, which potentially could have triggered the civil rebellion the mutineers sought. Possibly this was the intention all along, forcing the British to lash out at the population, which in turn would generate a civil uprising.

Ultimately the use of terror on both sides engendered a fighting fervour in both mutineer and European. However the changes in morale and zeal brought about by other factors mentioned earlier eventually ensured that by September the respective drive and morale of the forces at Delhi had been reversed. By the eve of the attack on the city the DFF were in the ascendancy and eager for the fight, whilst the mutineers had lost that initial spark of enthusiasm and hope that they had had in May.

Morale, fervour and religious zeal, therefore, though important ingredients at Delhi, cannot be considered to have been particularly decisive for either side during the siege. However, their relative merits were of greater importance for the actual assault on the city and in this context the advantage lay squarely with the DFF.

Logistics

Turning to the logistics of the two forces, it is difficult to see any really critical factors that affected the outcome of the siege. The mutineers were disorganised

during the early days in Delhi with little or no supply chain to speak of. Individual formations or groups looked after themselves and took what they needed often at the point of a bayonet. Although Shah and his "commanders" attempted to restore some sort of order to the situation, little was achieved until the arrival of Bakht Khan. However the mutineers did have the resources of an entire city available to them and what they lacked in organisation and structure was perhaps made up for in quantity. As well as this, the British inability properly to invest the city meant that the mutineers were free to move men and materiel in and out of Delhi at will.

Conversely the British, although a much smaller and better-disciplined force to supply and organise, suffered from a number of logistic problems. Their supply lines were exposed through miles of potentially hostile territory. Every supply train required armed escort and was under constant threat of attack. Foraging around the ridge positions was not feasible and the force found itself short of almost every critical supply from ammunition to medicine. At one point the British, desperately short of large calibre artillery ammunition, resorted to paying a bounty for the retrieval of spent cannonballs fired at the ridge positions, which would then be fired back at the city.

It shows the lack of strategic thought on the part of the mutineers that more attention was not given to this area. The cutting of the British supply chain would have defeated the DFF far faster than the repetitive and unsuccessful frontal assaults on the ridge that were employed. The only limited success they did have, perhaps without realising its significance, was the destruction of the Bagpat bridge. However they failed to capitalise on this and, had they but considered it, the garrison of Delhi had the force completely to encircle the ridge position and starve it into submission, effectively besieging the besiegers.

With hindsight it is possible to conclude that, although the greatest problem of the DFF was it small size compared to the city garrison, this may also have been its salvation. Would a force of ten or twenty thousand have been able to stay on the ridge and remain supplied until the arrival of the siege train? Would a much larger force have been forced to withdraw towards Meerut to secure its supply chain? Of course the question is hypothetical, not least because if Wilson had had 20,000 men on the ridge he would almost certainly not have waited to attack the city. His two reasons for waiting had always been reinforcement and siege artillery. With a force of 20,000 he would almost certainly have attacked even without the guns. However the question remains: at what point would the DFF have become unsustainable but not yet strong enough to storm the city in the absence of the siege train?

Looked at in this context it becomes clear that the siege artillery was in fact a very real force multiplier. Its delay in reaching Delhi, and indeed the DFF's supply difficulties, were not due to a lack of siege equipment or supplies but rather the lack of transportation for them. Dalhousie's army reforms had removed virtually the entire army transportation infrastructure. The Transport Corps' bullocks and wagons had been sold as a cost-cutting measure under the proviso that in future transport would be hired locally as and when required. Of course Dalhousie had not foreseen a widespread sepoy rebellion and a civil population who, if not openly in revolt, were at least sympathetic to the mutineer cause. As a result in May 1857 the army was desperately short of transportation, which in turn contributed to Anson's slow response to events after the initial outbreak.

The logical conclusion therefore is that had Wilson's force continued to grow before the siege train arrived, or indeed had it not arrived at all, then Wilson would

have been forced either to attack or to withdraw from Delhi before the DFF became unsustainable.

Either way it would seem that neither side enjoyed a particular advantage because of its logistics and this did not play a critical role in the British victory.

Soldiers

In battle both native and European troops had performed acts of great heroism and daring, although the contemporary view generally suggested that native troops were less courageous and capable than their European counterparts. In particular there was perceived to be a marked difference in the discipline under fire of the two groups. In the most recent wars of India prior to 1857, the Sikh wars, many contemporaries reported sepoy units breaking under fire. However it is more difficult to discover similar stories of European troops.[109]

The Sikh wars were the last major campaigns of the sepoys before the mutiny and their performance during these wars is critical to understanding their successes and failures during the mutiny.

The Sikhs were the most capable and well trained of the native enemies that Britain encountered in India. Trained in the 1820's along European lines by officers fresh from the Peninsular wars, the Sikh Army, the Khalsa Dal, by 1840 boasted a well trained and equipped all arms force of 60,000 men.

The campaigns against the Khalsa Dal in both conflicts give a fascinating insight into how sepoys fought against a force that was the closest to a European army

[109] Such stories do however exist, such as the rout of the European cavalry at the battle of Chillianwallah in 1848.

ever achieved by any native army in India other than that of the EIC itself. In fighting the Khalsa Dal the forces of the EIC were almost fighting a mirror image of themselves.

The success of the sepoy armies up to 1840 can at least in part be attributed to a discipline and firepower far superior to any enemy they faced. But this was not so with the Sikhs and the performance of the sepoy armies was consequently not as impressive. Many contemporary sources hint that the breaking of sepoy regiments was by no means uncommon during the Sikh wars and often it was left to the European regiments to save the day. William Hodson wrote of the battle of Ferozeshah in 1845, "In the most dense dust and smoke, and under an unprecedented fire of grape, our Sepoys again gave way and broke. It was a fearful crisis, but the bravery of the English regiments saved us." [110]

In this battle half of the casualties on the British side were Europeans, despite the fact that they made up only one seventh of the total force.[111] In general the Sikh wars saw far higher casualties than had previously been experienced in Indian campaigns. In part this can be explained by the use of simplistic frontal tactics by commanders such as Sir Hugh Gough, who, though a popular and well-liked general, never grasped the fact that the Khalsa Dal was a significantly more capable foe than any he had met in India before. His use of brute force and frontal assault with bayonet charges was successful at battles such as Maharajpore (1843), Mudki (1846), and Sobraon (1846); however, it also proved costly, most notably at the Battle of Chillianwallah (1848).

[110] Allen, *Soldier Sahibs*, p. 68.
[111] James, *Raj*, p. 124.

On 13 January 1848 Gough threw 16000 infantry and cavalry against 35000 Sikhs in well-prepared defensive positions. The cavalry charge become bogged down in thorn thickets and was mauled by artillery before eventually breaking in disarray. Only a concerted infantry assault saved the situation with losses of 2000. The Sikhs eventually retired in good order, and, although the position was won, Gough was severely criticised for his losses and for the lack of discipline displayed by the cavalry.

Too often the inadequacies of 'out of touch' commanders were covered up by the costly victories of brave men on the battlefield and Gough's campaigns during the Sikh wars were a perfect example. However Gough was by no means alone in his faith in British bayonets rather than sound tactics and planning. Sir Charles Napier, another Indian veteran, declared, "No troops in the world will withstand the assault of British troops, if made with the bayonet and without firing."[112] Whilst at Ferozeshah Lord Hardinge had ordered his infantry, "...not to fire but to take the position with the bayonet & go up at a walk"[113]

Of course this 'superiority' did not extend to native troops, even under British officers, and their failures against the Sikhs were attributed to a variety of causes, including a lack of courage, moral fibre, discipline, fighting spirit or even British determination and doggedness. Ultimately however the sepoy armies were able to defeat the forces of the Khalsa Dal in both Sikh wars.

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[112] H Strachan, *From Waterloo to Balaclava – Tactics, Technology, and the British Army, 1815-1854*, (Cambridge 1985), p.27.
[113] Strachan, *From Waterloo..*, p. 27.

However, by the 1850's, the aura that surrounded the forces of Britain had waned since the heady days of Clive and Wellesley. The army's reputation had suffered from occasional defeats at the hands of native enemies. The particular thorn of Afghanistan cut deep and the defeat of Elphinstone's entire army had finally shattered the myth of British invincibility. Subsequent reverses and pyrrhic victories at the hands of the Sikhs had eaten away at the military reputation of the EIC and Crown forces. However, perhaps the greatest blow came from the perceived mismanagement of British efforts in the Crimea in 1854-55.

Events on the Crimean peninsula were closely watched in India. The Crimea marked the first truly 'public' war for Britain, with reports on the action coming to Britain from genuine war correspondents entirely separate from the military command structure. Indeed, the sometimes scathing reports of 'The Times' correspondent, William Howard Russell, went into great detail on the army's mismanagement not just of operations but also of its supply and medical organisations.[114]

With this kind of information relatively freely available, the British army was seen to be ill prepared for war and apparently led by aristocratic officers with no concept of strategy, tactics or planning. This view was further fuelled by debacles such as the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava or the bloody repulses of the allied troops during the assaults on the Redan strongpoint in June 1855.[115]

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[114] The collected Crimean dispatches of Russell can be found in W H Russel, *The War 1854-55(Volumes 1 and 2),* (London 1859).

[115] A more detailed account of the Crimean War can be found in the work of Andrew Lambert, *The Crimean War – British Grand Strategy 1853-56,* (Manchester 1990) and Philip Warner's, *The Crimean War- a reappraisal,* (London 1972).

From the viewpoint of colonial territories, and particularly of the educated Indian Princes who were so prominent in the mutiny, the lesson was clear, the British army could be defeated on the battlefield; its generals were not all Clives or Wellingtons. There was in fact hope, where none had existed before, that the native soldier could overcome his European adversary.[116]

The image of the 19th Century British soldier is that of a well trained, disciplined man who overcame great odds to achieve victory in the face of adversity. Whilst this view was not always an accurate one it was nevertheless truer than not in the Victorian era. During this period, with the British Empire at its zenith, the army fought across the globe against a variety of enemies. In the reign of Queen Victoria the British army fought in over fifty major campaigns outside Europe, not including the myriad frontier actions in India. Hence, with the exception of the Crimean War, the experience of the British Army in the 19th century was based almost exclusively on colonial conflict where victories were generally achieved by small forces using a combination of discipline and firepower.

The British army was smaller than those of most of its major European neighbours. In European warfare it had consistently relied upon allies and fought in coalition. In fact the armies of both Marlborough and Wellington at one point or

[116] English language Indian newspapers carried comprehensive coverage of events in the Crimea and were widely available in India. Additionally W H Russell recorded in his *My Diary in India (Volumes 1 and 2),*(London 1859), his meeting, in the Crimea, with Azimullah Khan, a young man in the employ of Nana Sahib. Khan was returning from London after his unsuccessful petition, on his masters' behalf, to the EIC directors regarding recent inheritances and the Company's refusal to allow Nana Sahib to use certain titles and receive certain allowances. Khan told Russell that the purpose of his detour to the Crimea was to observe the British Army in its current difficulties. Russell, *My Diary..*, Vol.I, pp.167-68. David also discusses the effect of the Sikh and Crimean Wars in his thesis during his discussion of the 'conspiracy' theory, *The Bengal Army..*, Chapter 7.

another contained more foreign troops than British.[117] In the Victorian era the army, though larger because of imperial commitments, was rarely concentrated in one place. In colonial operations it would be most unusual to find a large British army operating anywhere and indeed it is almost impossible to find a battle before the Mutiny where British forces outnumbered their enemy. The defeat of a numerically inferior native enemy, should such an action occur, would be regarded as almost routine and certainly of little note.

The technology of the Victorian soldier played a large part in his success in campaigns through India, Africa, Canada, Australasia, and South East Asia, against such opponents as Afghans, Pathans, Sikhs, Zulus, Maoris and a host of others. However the argument that victory relied on technological superiority is not straightforward. Jeremy Black, in his book, *War and the World – Military power and the fate of continents*, (Yale 1998), argues that no real technology gap existed until the 1850's, and that before this the success of European countries in colonial warfare cannot be attributed to superior technology. Whilst it is fair to say that, at least in India, a Pathan or Maratha musket was no more or less capable than an EIC one, Black misses the point that technology is not just about physical capability but also about control and utilisation. It was not the technology itself that was decisive in colonial warfare: it was its control and utilisation.

The ability of the EIC to train armies in close order drill and aimed volley fire increased the effectiveness and utility of their technology. A company of sepoys firing 100 muskets in volley fire would be far more effective than the same 100 muskets in the hands of skirmishing Afghans, Pathans, or Marathas. As a result the technology gap played a significant role in colonial warfare long before the 1850's.

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[117] Holmes, *Redcoat*.., p.13.

Certainly in India, and even more so against less advanced enemies, the British soldier relied extensively on technology **and its effective utilisation**, to achieve victory in a number of colonial campaigns.

The danger of these sweeping victories was that it produced the belief that the British soldier was in every way superior to his native opponent. This view was widespread and survived long after the mutiny. In 1867 Sir H M Havelock-Allen (another mutiny veteran but not to be confused with Sir Henry Havelock) wrote:

....our Army in India leaves little to be desired, that is, in consideration of the class of enemies it has, or is likely to have, to encounter. To say nothing of the difference of national spirit and character, or the advantages of discipline and organisation, Armstrong field and siege guns, Enfield rifles, as opposed to the old artillery, the smooth bore musket, the flint lock 'Brown Bess', or the still more clumsy and inefficient matchlock of native armies, or of our own Native Army if it should again revolt, give us, irrespective of any odds in numbers, a preponderance that is irresistible.[118]

Havelock-Allen's opinion seems clear: a combination of technology, discipline, organisation, and "national spirit" could overcome the greatest of odds to secure victory against a native opponent in India. We have already seen similar views in the words of Charles Napier, and Heathcote also makes the point:

[118] Sir H M Havelock, *Three Main Military Questions of the Day*, (London 1867), p. 122

European victories over Indian troops, largely the result of temporary advantages in military technology or political organisation, were ascribed to cultural or racial superiority, despite the fact that the British conquered India largely by the use of Indian manpower.[119]

The perception of many in 1857, and after, was that any small British force in a given tactical situation could defeat a numerically superior native force through discipline and firepower. This in turn ensured that tactical thought and "Generalship" became less important in these actions. Lawrence James makes the point:

By the early nineteenth century it was commonly believed that British fighting men possessed an inbred psychological advantage over their adversaries……A well founded confidence in the 'natural' doggedness and willpower of the British regular tended to absolve generals from exercising their brains[120]

More dangerously this belief came to be almost doctrinal, and more pressure was consequently applied to small British forces to control, and, if necessary, defeat, native enemies who were developing their own tactics and weapons along European lines. This led to the high-cost campaigns of Gough and his eventual dismissal at the end of the Second Sikh War. Gough's victories can be attributed to the courage and discipline of the men under his command far more than to any feat of generalship or tactical thought on his part. However, this was the way native wars were fought and

[119] T A Heathcote, *The military in British India – The development of British land forces in South Asia, 1600-1947*, (Manchester 1995), p. xiv.
[120] L James, *Warrior Race* (London 2001), pp. 324-325.

even the casualties of two Sikh wars would not change the entrenched position of many general officers regarding campaigning in India.

This point is graphically illustrated at Delhi in 1857. Never in the European theatre would a commander of a small polyglot force such as the DFF be ordered to storm a fortress held by an army four or five times its size - a fortress, which in fact it did not even have enough force to invest fully and whose defences were superior to the limited siege train immediately available. Moreover, it was a fortress in the heart of hostile territory which left the besiegers with no clear or secure lines of communication and re-supply. One can imagine the reaction of Wellington if he were ordered to take 5000 men and capture Paris at the height of the Napoleonic wars.

Indeed the concept of an inferior force laying siege to a city or fortress was an entirely alien one in mainland Europe. Three years earlier in the Crimea the siege of Sevastopol at its height had seen an Allied army of 67,000 besieging a Russian garrison that never exceeded 43,000. Whilst admittedly the defences of Sevastopol were significantly more impressive than those of Delhi, it is quite clear that against a European enemy such as the Russians it was necessary to have a preponderance of force to lay siege to a fortress town.

Yet in India the orders for Anson to retake Delhi as quickly as possible were given without a second thought on the usual grounds that a British soldier would always triumph over his native foe. His courage, discipline and technology would see to that, regardless of the odds. In general terms this was how colonial, and certainly Indian, warfare was conducted. There was rarely the time, or indeed the need, for prolonged sieges or campaigns. At Multan in 1848 the city, under the control of the

Sikhs, was fully invested at the end of December and fell on 05 January 1849 by storm. Shortly after, at Gujrat, the last battle of the Second Sikh War, Gough's army of 23,000 showed no hesitation in attacking the Sikh army of 60,000 in its entrenched positions. In this one and only example of tactical finesse displayed by Gough, the use of supporting cavalry and artillery spared the infantry their customary losses and the forces of the Khalsa Dal were defeated for the last time.

British 'superiority' and 'technology' were expected to overcome great odds almost as a matter of course. **Neither enemy numerical superiority nor strong fortifications were considered reasons to delay attacks against native foes.**

The obvious question then was how British troops would fare if they could not bring their technology to bear against the overwhelming numbers of their opponents. On the occasions where this actually happened the native opponents proved more than capable of defeating the "superior" British troops. An early and unpleasant example of this had been the disastrous withdrawal from Kabul in 1842.

In general terms the British soldier of the 19th century relied heavily on both technology and discipline under fire to defeat his enemies. The absence of one or both could easily lead to a victory for whichever side had the greater numbers. Chillianwallah, although generally regarded as a draw, could easily have proved a decisive defeat for the British had the charge of the infantry not saved the day. Apart from the flawed tactics of Gough, the other major contributory factor to this near defeat was the breaking of the British cavalry and its subsequent undisciplined scramble back through the British lines. In colonial warfare such as this the British never relied upon weight of numbers and were totally dependent on discipline and firepower. Simply put, British armies in the period relied on quality not quantity.

But in the case of the mutiny the technology and firepower on both sides were essentially equal. The firepower of a disciplined volley discharged by a native regiment of infantry was on a par with that of its European counterpart. Certainly at Delhi, the mutineers had the advantage of firepower with many more muskets, rifles, and cannon than the British force on the ridge could muster. This then gives rise to the conclusion that the only appreciable difference between the British soldier on the ridge and his mutineer counterpart on the walls of the city was his discipline and performance under fire.

The courage and discipline of British troops under fire are often quoted and generally applauded in historical works. It is difficult to decide where and when in modern times this reputation originates. However the performance of British troops during the Napoleonic Wars is as good a starting place as any. The brutal nature of pitched battles in the late 18th and early 19th century demanded iron discipline and unquestioning obedience to orders.

Soldiers, as with all of us, have a limit. Beyond this limit they will succumb to their fears and animal instinct to survive, and they will run from death and danger. This is countered by discipline, and so discipline under fire becomes one of the most crucial pivots of any army. The general who ignores the discipline of his army is risking much and as many battles have been lost by a break in discipline as have been won by brilliant generalship.

Arguably the need for discipline was a function of the abilities of the enemy and his capacity to kill your troops. If he had no artillery or cavalry and only a limited

ability to fire ragged volleys of musketry, then there was less chance of your troops breaking before him. Discipline was needed to counter the individual's instinct to run when all around him was death and destruction. And so while essential in Europe against a competent and disciplined enemy such as the French, it was perhaps less needed in colonial actions against native foes. The very high casualty figures from battles during the Napoleonic wars were primarily due to the fact that one side would only normally break after enduring heavy casualties. However, against a non-regular force casualties would often be light, as they were more likely to break after one or two volleys or a concerted charge.

With the notable exception of the Sikh wars and singular examples such as the retreat from Kabul, casualties in colonial warfare rarely rose above 10 percent. On the European mainland figures between 20 and 40 percent were not unusual – 20 percent for the allied forces at Austerlitz (1805); 29 percent for the Prussians at Jena (1805); upto 40 percent for the Russians at Borodino (1812); 25 percent for the allies at Waterloo (1815); and 14 percent for the Russians at Balaclava (1855).[121]

Similarly, when on the defensive, a regular force could normally stand up to an attack by native infantry or cavalry without difficulty, provided it could make best use of its superior firepower. The multitude of actions on the North West Frontier in the 1830's and 1840's frequently bore witness to small detachments holding a building, mud fort, or village against far superior numbers of irregular attackers.

[121] Based on the reported killed and wounded as a function of the total force and rounded to the nearest 500. R Holmes (Ed), *The Oxford Companion to Military History,* (Oxford 2001), pp.109, 142, 238-239,464. M Glover, *The Peninsular War 1807-1814 – A Concise Military History,* (London 1974), pp. 22-23, and 55. Allen, *Soldier Sahibs,* pp.42, 70-73, and 190-92. Lambert, *The Crimean War..,* p.127. Holmes, *Redcoat..,* pp. 249-252.

It would be fair to say, then, that native sepoys operating almost exclusively against native enemies would not require the iron discipline of a European formation fighting against another European enemy. A sepoy formation was never intended to stand against a competent enemy of European standards using cavalry, infantry, and artillery, hence its somewhat shaky reputation against the Sikhs. It was trained to defeat the enemies of British India whilst fighting side by side with European troops. As Ingram writes:

The British conquered much of India, partly because they could rely upon the Indian princes to quarrel with one another, or partly because they could rely upon their troops to run away. The British had no doubt about the value of European discipline and leadership.[122]

It would seem then that the level of discipline required from sepoy formations was less than that required from a European one.

Officers

As important as the qualities of the soldiers themselves must be the abilities of their leaders. It is necessary therefore to consider the officers of both sides and attempt some assessment of their efforts in the overall success or failure of their troops.

Looking first at the unit level, it has already been seen that both sides

[122] E Ingram, *In defence of British India,* (London 1984), p. 49.

contained men of high calibre capable of leading troops in battle at the company or battalion level. From the mutineer perspective there was a vast pool of experienced native officers who had been trained by their European masters over the years. However their great limitation was the artificial capping of their promotion. Rising through the ranks took many years but still limited the man to duties at the company level. The days of native commandants of battalions that had existed in the early years of the EIC army were gone and now a native officer with 40 years soldiering might, if he was fortunate, rise to the rank of a Subeldar Major in his regiment just as he was in his sixties.

As a result, although at first appearance the sepoys had a great many officers and leaders available, in reality many were old and nearing retirement whilst the younger ones, in their 40's or 50's, lacked experience above the small sub-unit level. In the words of one British general officer in India, these men would only rise to the rank of officers once they were, "...worn out imbeciles unfit for command."[123]

Of course this is somewhat overstated and an officer in his 50's, though clearly no longer in his prime, might nevertheless have still proved to be an effective leader, albeit only at the level of his experience. Because of this, although the mutineers could call on large numbers of native officers at the tactical level, they were totally devoid of any officers used to commanding formations of more than a hundred or so men (company level).

The more cynical might consider that this deliberate capping of promotion and command opportunities was a clever move on the part of the British to safeguard against uprising. Certainly the lack of real military leaders was a major cause of the

[123] Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny*, p. 48.

failure of the mutineers. However no evidence has come to light to suggest this was a deliberate ploy and for the moment this possibility remains conjecture.

Nevertheless its result was devastating for the mutineer cause, as their eventual defeat bears witness. The ability of India to produce great military leaders and army commanders was smothered by the military system of the EIC. In its past India had proved more than capable of producing generals and the country had a proud martial tradition long before the arrival of Europeans. But by the 1850's there simply was no native army to lead in war. The defeat of the Sikhs had ended the last native challenge to British rule and an army under a native general could only be a threat. By the 1850's native officers were carefully selected and groomed to be useful subordinates providing a link between soldier and European officer. Undoubtedly brave and capable, they were nevertheless dependent on higher direction from a European commander. This was not because they were incapable of grasping the vagaries of higher command but rather because they were never given the opportunity.

For this reason the best known leaders of the Indian Mutiny were not to be found in the ranks of the Bengal Army. Individuals as Bahadur Shah, Nana Sahib, Tatya Tope, or the Rani of Jhansi were all from, or servants of, noble families brought up with the natural sense of pride, superiority, and leadership that was perhaps lacking in many of the native officers of the Bengal Army. None of these major figures in the mutiny had any direct involvement with the Bengal Army.

The exception is Bakht Khan at Delhi. His performance and eventual failure have already been discussed, and ultimately he played only a limited role in the mutiny as a whole.

The European officer cadre was by no means free from problems. In the Royal regiments, the officers were hampered by the system of commission purchase. Money overtaking merit ensured that for every competent company or battalion commander in the army there might be two or three incompetent but wealthy ones. Similarly, although there was no purchase for 'high' command appointments, privilege, status and wealth counted far more than performance on the battlefield when it came to selecting peacetime generals. General officers were selected from the officers who had risen to the peak of the Regimental system. As a result the wealthy but incompetent colonel of a regiment could easily become a general years before his poor, but competent, contemporary. However, the purchase system also allowed younger men to become generals sooner and when these men proved competent commanders the army actually benefited from the system.

In rough terms two thirds of commissions granted between 1660 and 1871 were purchased.[124] However this was predominantly a feature of peacetime and in time of war a significant change to this balance would be effected by demand for officers outstripping the supply of suitably wealthy volunteers. The next most senior officer of the regiment would generally fill a death vacancy in action. Another officer could attempt to purchase the appointment but in this eventuality the first officer generally had preserved rights and the matter would be settled internally within the regiment. Equally, particularly in India, death vacancies would also occur through disease and so particularly unhealthy stations or periods of war could dramatically shift the balance of commissions within a regiment and the army as a whole.

[124] Holmes, *Redcoat..*, p. 157.

At the height of the Peninsular Wars 70 percent of officers held their position by merit, with only 20 percent owing it to purchase, and the remaining 10 percent accounted for by family connections or private arrangements.[125] During peacetime senior British officers remained in post far beyond their years and physical health dictated. Officers who were unemployed remained on the active list on half pay and therefore had no incentive to retire from the army. This resulted in a lack of younger fitter commanders at the outbreak of war. The choice of the invalid 59-year old General Elphinstone to command at Kabul in 1842 contributed to one of the greatest disasters ever to befall a British army. Shortly after this the Sikh wars saw examples such as Brigadier Hope, Gough's cavalry commander at Chillianwallah, who had to be lifted onto his horse and was partially blind. Less than ten years later the British command in the Crimea was given to Lord Raglan who, at 67 years old, was considered too old and infirm by many. He was appointed largely because there was no-one else available of similar seniority. The lack of other suitable officers became all too apparent on Raglan's death from cholera on 28 July 1855. Great debate about a replacement followed; Raglan's deputy, General Sir George Brown, had already been invalided home, leaving the rather weak and uninspiring General Sir James Simpson in command - who himself resigned in September. His resignation was rejected as the government could provide no other suitable officer.

However, it must also be remembered that a great many officers who purchased commissions, or were allowed to remain on beyond a sensible retirement age, proved to be most competent. Equally, purchasing commissions **could** produce

[125] M Glover, "The Purchase of Commissions: A Reappraisal", *JSAHR* No.58 (1980), pp. 223-224 and 232-233.

relatively young generals. It is important to realise that the system did not of itself produce incompetent officers. It merely allowed more of them to attain higher command, alongside their more competent contemporaries, than would have been possible if promotion had been based purely on ability.

The inherent flaw in the system was not the device of purchase per se but rather the allowing of officers to remain on the active list beyond a sensible age. A prolonged period of peace would inevitably find the British army with a glut of senior officers of advanced age. Whilst purchase and seniority promotion worked well in the high attrition rate of war, it reverted to a slow and cumbersome system of 'dead men's shoes' in peacetime. In 1857, the early demise of both Generals Anson and Barnard, followed by the rapid departure of General Reed, raised the question of their fitness and suitability for posts in India.

The officers of the EIC army did not use the purchase system. This was one of the few differences in the organisation and management of the two forces. Additionally the EIC had many more applicants for cadetships than they had vacancies during the period 1830-1857. A great many young men viewed a military career in India as a golden opportunity to make their fortune. They included the likes of Herbert Edwardes, Harry Lumsden, James Abbot, and of course three of the Nicholson brothers.[126] The net result of the overbearing of volunteers was that, as opposed to their Royal counterparts, the wealth of an individual's family was not necessarily the single most important factor to his successful selection as a cadet.

[126] This group is perhaps the most famous of the EIC "young men" and became the personal protégés of Henry Lawrence.

Indeed many young men who could not afford to purchase a commission in a Royal Regiment found themselves applying to the EIC in London. Because of this the Company could afford to be more selective in its choices and there was greater scope for merit and ability. In short the EIC tended to attract the younger and bolder men who genuinely sought action and adventure in far off India.

The second great advantage of the EIC was that all of its cadets were trained together to the same standard in two purpose built colleges in Britain. Although similar to the Royal army colleges at Woolwich and Sandhurst, the EIC colleges differed in that attendance was compulsory. The officers destined for the cavalry or infantry of the Royal army were not required to attend a military college. Only those Royal officers becoming engineers or gunners were required to attend at Woolwich. As a result a great many line officers went direct to their Royal regiments without ever attending a military academy.

In terms of the relationship between EIC and Royal officers, the officers of Royal Regiments generally looked down upon EIC officers as their social and professional inferiors. However, it is generally held that whilst perhaps this was true in the social standing of Victorian society, in purely professional terms:

By the criteria of military sociologists – even if not according to the judgements of many of their contemporaries…- the officer corps of the EIC's army was more professional than that of the forces of the crown.[127]

[127] Strachan, *From Waterloo...*, p. 79

Despite this, Royal officers held all high command appointments in India, and, in particular, the Commander in Chief was always a regular army officer. The British army saw India as a safe but prestigious station for officers approaching retirement. As a result many officers in post at the start of the mutiny were simply not up to the rigours of campaigning. Equally some officers, both EIC and Royal, found themselves in positions beyond their capabilities in the sudden crisis.

The 67-year old General Hewitt was relieved of his command in the Meerut district shortly after the outbreak. Equally, Generals Anson and Barnard might have met similar fates had cholera not claimed them early in the campaign. They at least lasted longer than the unfortunate General Reed, who had relieved himself of command after only two weeks in command at Delhi. Similarly Major General Wheeler, commander at Cawnpore, was saved further criticism of his questionable tactics by his death at the massacre at the boats.[128] Major General Lloyd was dismissed as commander at Danapur following the failed attempt to relieve Arrah. At Ferozepur Brigadier Innes was summarily removed from the Brigadiers' list for his lack of offensive initiative and his decision to destroy the large arsenal and magazine of the city, to prevent it falling into mutineer hands, despite his strong garrison of 1000 men of the 61st Regiment of Foot and some European artillery.

Similarly Colonel Polwhele, in command of the British troops at Agra, was dismissed following the battle of Sussiah on 05 July 1857 for, "...a total want of

[128] Wheeler was criticised for his poor choice of defensive position at what came to be known as 'Wheelers Entrenchment' and also for his trust in, and willingness to negotiate with, the mutineer leadership at Cawnpore.

sufficient military talents and forethought for the very important command which he was entrusted..."[129]

Despite this Polwhele continued through the promotion lists of the army and died a general in 1885.

At Delhi, Brigadier Archdale Wilson, although an EIC officer, was 54 years old when he assumed command of the DFF as a Lieutenant General. This was comparatively old by EIC standards but conversely rather young when compared against his equivalents in the ranks of the Royal army. Interestingly the enigmatic Brigadier General John Nicholson despite his similar, but junior, rank was only 36 at the time. This in itself is perhaps the simplest and most effective indication of the difference between the officers of the EIC and the Royal army. Although the EIC had its share of officers approaching retirement such as Wilson, it also had officers like Nicholson whose rank, albeit only an acting one in the current crisis, had been awarded because of his abilities and suitability as the best man for the job.

This was nothing new for the EIC. In 1847 the subjugation and collection of revenues from Bannu in the Punjab was entrusted to the 29 year old Lieutenant Herbert Edwardes, another of Lawrence's 'young men'. Edwardes found himself in command of a force of Sikhs numbering 1500 irregular horse, one regiment of cavalry, five regiments of infantry, and two troops of artillery. Even more remarkable, this was Edwardes's first command of troops in the field. Despite this the operation was a complete success and forged his reputation in India. Similarly the 25-year-old Lieutenant Joe Lumsden found himself in command of three thousand Sikh infantry and six guns in Hazara in 1846 during the British expedition to secure

[129] MS Letter from Colonel Birch, Military Secretary in Calcutta, dated 29 Sep 1857 quoted by Taylor, *A Companion..*, p. 270.

Kashmir. The senior governors and military officers of the EIC thought nothing of entrusting large numbers of troops, albeit native ones, to young inexperienced white European officers. This explains how Nicholson found himself in command of such a large force at Delhi. It also shows how relatively junior officers in both the EIC and Royal regiments played such important roles in the suppression of the mutiny, despite their relative youth.

Of course we must not forget the successful regular army commanders who followed Nicholson and Wilson and went on to suppress the mutiny. Men such as the 62 year old Sir Henry Havelock, or the 65 year old Sir Colin Campbell, to name but two, were also products of the systems discussed above and despite their age proved to be eminently successful in their campaigns during 1857-59.

This represents a brief overview of the contemporary British leadership at the time of the Indian mutiny. It can be seen that there was a mixture of young and capable junior officers, and older more experienced senior officers, some past their prime. Many officers at the start of the mutiny were not up to the task set them. Still others rose to the challenge and achieved great things even though relatively junior in rank. As Charles Allen writes:

....India was always a young man's country. The striking exception to this rule was its generals, allowed to stagger on into their dotage as field commanders, often with near-disastrous consequences. Time and again, it was the young men under them who saved their skins and reputations...[130]

[130] Allen, *Soldier Sahibs*, p. 10.

Whilst this point tends to ignore the victories of some of these men in their 'dotage', such as Gough, Campbell, or Havelock, it is nevertheless not unreasonable to suggest that British military actions, certainly in the 1840's and 1850's, owed their successes as much to young gifted amateurs as they did to old experienced professionals.

Putting this into the context of the DFF it is clear that for a variety of reasons the senior command structure at Delhi in 1857 was far from ideal. Four commanders in short succession meant an inconsistent approach, and many orders and counter-orders, interpreted as indecision. Lieutenant Thomas Caddell wrote:

I don't see how we are ever to get inside Delhi under the choice collection of muffs we have at our head...The mismanagement beats the Crimea almost...we seldom see a field officer and everything is left to the captains and subalterns.[131]

In fact it was principally thanks to Wilson's efforts that any stability at all was achieved on the ridge. However, although an effective and intelligent officer, Wilson was no Wellington or Marlborough. His cautious approach, though probably justified, proved a real danger to the recapture of Delhi and it was largely due to the efforts of his subordinate officers that the assault ever took place.

It can be seen then that the mutineers had little in the way of a command structure, whilst the DFF was significantly better served. The crucial difference was

[131] Lt Thomas Cadell, MS letters, Cadell Letters, Jun - Jul 1857. NAM Collection 6609/139.

not so much in the commanders but rather in the subordinate officers. In the case of the mutineers no-one beyond the ineffectual military council and a loose amalgamation of native officers under Bakht Khan; but on the British side a small cadre of extremely gifted and brave men with an intrinsic understanding of campaigning in India, and with personal experience of the fighting abilities of native and European troops.

Organisation

In terms of organisation, and particularly staff organisation, the preceding chapters have already provided a brief insight into the organisation of the two forces. Broadly speaking the organisation of formations, the companies, battalions and regiments, remained unchanged on both sides. The mutineers fought in the units which they had always fought in, with recognised formations at their side, or in support. They retained their native officers but without the European commander they were used to.

By way of contrast the DFF was a polyglot force of both native and European, EIC and Royal, troops. Some were veterans whilst others were new to India. Few below the officer level had worked together before and there was the inevitable friction between the EIC and Royal troops.[132] However this was not a situation unique in Indian warfare. The nature of operations in India lent itself to smaller and more numerous garrisons spread throughout the country. When an incident occurred

[132] There existed significant mistrust and dislike between EIC and Royal officers. Peter Stanley devotes some effort to this area in his book, *White Mutiny*, (London 1998), and provides a useful insight into the relationships between the two.

a force was assembled from whoever was available and despatched under a nominated commander. The troops would not necessarily have worked together before and would almost certainly have consisted of both native and European elements. What made this combination work effectively in dozens of Indian campaigns was the understanding and strength of the relationship between the leader of the force, his staff, and the troops.

It was in the staff organisation that the greatest difference between the mutineers and the DFF existed. The mutineer command structure within Delhi and the military council were a singular failure. Even Bakht Khan was something of an insular and isolated leader. There simply was no intermediate level in the command chain between individual regiments and supreme commander. The mutineers lacked that interim staff level to coordinate the activities of separate components of their army, so freeing its commander to concentrate on fighting his battles.

Conversely the British had a well-established staff organisation with a number of highly trained officers. Major Richard Baird Smith, the Chief Engineer, and Captain Alex Taylor, his deputy, coordinated the defences of the ridge and later the siege sapping and battery placement. Captain William Hodson oversaw the DFF intelligence organisation. Major Neville Chamberlain worked under Barnard and later Wilson as Aide De Camp. In this task he was ably assisted by such officers as Majors Henry Norman and Edward Greathed, both of whose accounts of the siege have been quoted in preceding chapters.

Wilson wielded the sum of the parts of the DFF as a single entity in a way that the mutineers could not match. **Whereas Wilson commanded a small army before**

Delhi, Bakht Khan merely supervised the disparate constituents of a much larger one trying to defend it.

It may be concluded, then, that the answers to the questions of quality of the troops at Delhi were firmly in the favour of the DFF. The discipline under fire of the European troops was superior to that of the sepoys. Even the native troops with the DFF performed better, when bolstered by European troops, than the mutineer sepoys did when fighting alone.

Similarly the leadership of the DFF at all levels was superior to that of their mutineer opponents. British officers at the unit level were for the most part younger and more ambitious than their mutineer counterparts. Many had the daring and bravery of young single men seeking adventure and 'glory'. More importantly the integral role played by an experienced and dedicated staff provided a unity of effort and singularity of purpose to the DFF that the mutineers could not match. The raw leadership and inspiration of men such as Nicholson, Baird Smith, or even Hodson gave the British a huge psychological advantage that Shah and his collection of commanders and advisors were totally outclassed by.

Ultimately it can be seen that Delhi fell to the 'young men' of India leading an army of men, both European and native, dazzled and inspired by heroes like Hodson, Chamberlain and Nicholson.

CHAPTER 5 – A THOROUGHLY INDIAN SIEGE

The history of the Indian sub-continent was heavily influenced and shaped by conflicts between city states. Therefore, the development of siege warfare features prominently in its story.

Prior to the advent of gunpowder and siege artillery the fortresses of India, as with the rest of the world, were designed to defeat cavalry and infantry attacks following crude bombardments by catapult, trebuchet, or ballista type weapons. However, in addition to these, Asia and particularly India, also witnessed widespread use of war elephants to batter down fortress gates and strong points. In India, therefore, the technology of fortress building developed along broadly similar but subtly different lines from Europe.

Fortress gates and entrances were designed with curved and angular approaches to combat the charge of an elephant and prevent a long straight angle of attack. Once inside the attackers would have to contend with further winding narrow alleyways, generally overlooked from above, allowing defenders to rain down an assortment of missiles upon their enemies as they approached the next inner gate. This design of Indian fortress cities was common, and, though largely redundant by the 1850's, it remained largely unchanged and could be seen at Delhi, Agra, and Multan amongst others.[133]

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[133] Sidney Toy in his books, *The Strongholds of India*, (London 1957) and *The Fortified Cities of India*, (London 1965), discusses the great fortresses and fortress cities of India. Of equal interest is the work of Christopher Duffy, *Fire and Stone – The Science of Fortress Building 1660-1860*, (London 1996), concentrating predominantly on 17th to 19th century Europe. Also of interest are the more contemporary studies of 19th Century fortifications and artillery conducted by Major Hector Straith, *Treatise on Fortification and Artillery*, (London 1852) and *Introductory Essay to the study of Fortification for young officers of the army*, (London 1859).

The advent of Europeans, under the influence of engineers such as Vauban, Dahlberg, and Carnot, introduced new ideas and technologies, but in general Indian fortification remained largely unchanged during the 18th and early 19th centuries. This was largely because the policy of the EIC did not involve the building of new large-scale and expensive fortifications. The EIC preferred to defeat its enemies in the field and then garrison the territory with numerous and smaller frontier forts rather than a single larger structure. If it could save money by building upon, and modernising, existing fortifications, then so much the better. The only real exceptions to this were the three crucial sea-ports and centres of the presidencies at Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay. These three cities saw extensive fortification building, but not so much against a perceived native Indian threat, as to protect the cities against the EIC's European rivals, the French and the Dutch.[134]

As the forces of the EIC expanded commercially and militarily, many smaller fortresses and strongholds fell into their hands and were 'upgraded' using European methods. This method was also adapted to good effect by the French, and, when Robert Clive surprised and captured the city of Arcot in 1751 with a mixed native and European force of 800, he found the defences strong enough to allow him to hold off a Franco-Indian force of 10,000 for 50 days.[135]

Of course this principle could also be applied against the EIC and when it found itself without an adequate siege train it was as incapable of capturing an Indian

[134] A typical example was Fort St George at Madras. Built in 1639 it was designed to defend the city port from attack by both sea and land. Over the next two hundred years it was rebuilt and remodelled to take advantage of the advances in fortification construction and engineering.

[135] Arcot in 1751 marked a turning point for French fortunes in India at the hands of the as yet largely unknown Clive. This downturn in fortune would culminate with the Battle of Plassey 6 years later.

fortress as any native army had been. Lord Lake discovered this during the Maratha War of 1803-1805 with his fruitless siege of Bhurtpore in 1805. After numerous costly attacks over two months with a wholly inadequate siege train, he failed to capture the city and was forced to withdraw. The lesson from this was clear: in the absence of siege artillery and engineers, an older Indian style fortress, properly provisioned and garrisoned, could hold out against a modern European force, or indeed a native enemy, of cavalry and infantry.

The principle of upgrading existing Indian fortifications became an even more attractive prospect after the final defeat of the French threat in 1815. It was clear that the EIC was the dominant military power in India, with little to fear from either external European or indigenous native enemies. The absence of an organised enemy with siege artillery and engineers precluded the necessity for expensive and complex fortresses. Although a large army was still needed to control India, this army was quite secure in the cheaper and smaller cantonments, garrisons, and forts readily available.

As a result of the early dominance of the EIC, 18th and 19th century India did not undergo the same plethora of great sieges that afflicted European history in the same period.[136] However, siege warfare did play its part, and to understand the approach, methods and equipment used at Delhi in 1857 it is prudent first to examine some of the earlier examples of the art in India.

[136] The 'Great Sieges' are summarised by Duffy, *Fire and Stone*.., they include the sieges of Algiers (1816) and Antwerp (1832). To this could also be added such sieges as Badajoz (1812) or Sebastopol (1854-55).

In general terms, until the advent of rifled artillery in the 1860s, siege warfare in India, as with Europe, relied heavily upon the calibre and quantity of cannon to defeat masonry walls and fortifications. In India, most artillery would make short work of earth walls and mud fortifications. However the older and grander stone masonry fortresses required somewhat larger and more numerous siege trains. The absence of suitable artillery would allow even the smallest garrisons, provided they were well supplied, to hold out almost indefinitely.

The lesson from both Clive at Arcot and Lake at Bhurtpore was that artillery and engineers were needed even in India. Invariably EIC forces were well equipped with siege artillery. However they preferred to fight their battles in the open and avoid costly and protracted sieges. They far preferred the swift punitive campaigns in the field that marked the majority of actions during campaigns in India between 1795 and 1857. In most of these the superiority of artillery over older Indian fortifications and the use of swift assaults were clear and irrefutable.

Major General George Harris with Arthur Wellesley had captured the formidable fortress city of Seringapatam by storm after artillery had made a suitable breach just 18 days after the city was invested in 1799. The assault culminated in the capture of the city and the death of Tipu Sultan, ending the Mysore War.

Similarly, during the Second Maratha War (1803-1805), Wellesley captured the city of Ahmednuggur on 08 August 1803 and its attendant fort just four days later. Later, following his victory at Assaye he captured the fortress at Gawilghur by a 'coup de main' on 15 December. Simultaneously Wellesley's subordinate, Lord Lake, operating in the north as part of the same campaign captured Aligarh, Delhi and, most telling of all, the fortress of Agra; all without prolonged sieges.

Later, in 1805, Lake went on to meet his match at Bhurtpore and this failed siege represents one of the few examples where a European force failed to take an Indian fortress defended by a native enemy. However, this must be considered in conjunction with the fact that Lake's force was depleted and exhausted from numerous actions over the preceding two months, including the relief of Delhi and the battle at Deig. Added to this, Lake's forces had covered nearly 500 miles in marching and counter marching over the period. The war itself was concluded just two months later. However, had it continued, Bhurtpore would certainly have been invested with greater force. As a result, although Bhurtpore shows that it was possible for a native force to defend an Indian style fortress against European attack, it must also be viewed in the context of the quality, equipment (notably the lack of a proper siege train), and fitness of Lake's force at the time, and the impending end of the war. Ultimately the conclusion is dubious and little can be drawn from it other than the critical role of adequate siege artillery to defeat masonry fortifications.

As the EIC continued its policy of divide and conquer throughout India, many small campaigns and actions further testified to the merits of artillery, or indeed its absence, versus Indian fortifications. The Raja of Kittur's stronghold fell to EIC troops after a short and relatively bloodless siege in 1824, whilst conversely the British garrison of Herat held off the poorly equipped forces of Shah Muhhamad (acting under Russian patronage and support) for several months in 1838.[137]

[137] This clandestine support by Russia was part of the growing tensions over India between Russia and Britain during this period. It ultimately led to the British invasion of Afghanistan later in 1838.

The British found themselves fighting in Afghanistan from 1838 and further examples of siege warfare and its particular aspects in Asia are to be found in the annals of these campaigns. The fortress of Ghazni fell in 1839 to the deceptively simple device of a petard – sacks of gunpowder laid against the gate, which when fired forced poles or beams into and through the gate shattering it. This, another apparent example of the British preference for a swift 'coup de main', was actually a result of the British advancing so quickly towards Kabul that they had left their siege artillery far behind the advancing army.

The principal fortresses and military strongholds of Afghanistan such as Ghazni, Jalalabad, and Kandahar all fell to the British without difficulty or prolonged siege. Despite this, during the crisis of 1841-42 that saw the defeat of Elphinstone and the success of the Army of Retribution under General Pollock, these same stations, this time held by British garrisons, were able to hold out quite comfortably until relieved.[138]

The only appreciable difference in these cases appeared to be that between the besiegers and the besieged. Certainly the Afghans were a poorly organised 'army' and they did not possess enough of the siege artillery or engineers needed to capture fortresses.

British experience in Afghanistan, as in India, proved that modern methods of European siege warfare, properly applied and with adequate siege artillery when needed, could defeat the Asian fortress in a relatively short time. Conversely the same fortress, in the absence of an organised and properly equipped foe, could

[138] The exception being Ghazni which was surrendered after its commander received orders to do so from the imprisoned army commander in Kabul. The commanders at Kandahar and Jalalabad also received these orders but ignored them believing, rightly, that officers at Kabul were likely to be acting under duress. Allen, *Soldier Sahibs*, pp. 44-46.

generally hold out until relieved. Therefore, not only in Afghanistan but also in India, the only forces capable or equipped to besiege and capture fortresses were the EIC or the Royal forces of the Crown. As a result a fortress was rarely held against the British for long and one held by them was almost invulnerable. For these reasons the EIC in India confidently continued their policy of renovating existing Indian fortifications in the certain knowledge that there was no threat in India with an army proficient enough to capture even those outdated fortresses, securely held by the sepoy armies of the EIC.

The question then arises as to how would fortresses and sieges fare if Europeans found themselves up against other European foes or indeed more sophisticated native Indian foes? The buffer of Afghanistan against Russia ensured that there was no direct European threat to India. However, the Sikh wars of the 1840's, though largely mobile campaigns, have some interesting incidents.

Little was seen of what one would term 'true' sieges in the First Sikh War (1845-46), but the Khalsa Dal had employed fortified positions and earthworks. By 1845 the Sikhs were justifiably proud of their capabilities and saw the Khalsa Dal as a mobile army, which sought battle rather than the possession of static forts or towns. Despite this during the First Sikh War its leaders, perhaps unwilling to compromise their future positions with the British, lacked initiative and aggression, preferring to wait for the British to come to them. As a result, rather than utilising its mobility to try and outmanoeuvre the British the Khalsa Dal was used simply to pick favourable positions for static defensive battles in front of the advancing British. This led to the costly battles of Mudki and Ferozeshah, both during 1845.

At Sobraon (1846) the Sikhs outdid themselves with a spectacular series of fortified earth-work defences with supporting artillery. In this instance Gough elected to wait on reinforcement from Meerut, including a train of siege artillery. The subsequent artillery duel and frontal infantry assaults lasted two days before the British could claim a victory, effectively ending the First Sikh War.

The second Sikh War (1848-49) once again saw the Sikhs preferring to allow the British to come to them in their fortified positions. However, of greater note in this conflict in terms of siege warfare were the attempts of the Khalsa Dal to hold the fortress city of Multan.

The uprising against the British that marked the beginning of the Second Sikh War occurred in April 1848 at Multan. One of the oldest cities of the Indian sub continent, Multan was an entirely walled city, ringed with a 30 foot wall protected by a deep earth ditch. The city possessed an inner citadel and a garrison varying between five and ten thousand Sikhs. An Anglo-Sikh force of seven thousand arrived in August to invest the city, but this had to be abandoned shortly afterwards upon the mutiny of most of the Sikh troops. Further EIC troops arrived over the next two months, with siege artillery arriving by boat upriver on the Indus. However the city was not properly invested until the end of December. Multan then came under bombardment on 27 December, as British columns assaulted and captured the outlying suburbs and buildings of the city. A stray mortar round landed in, and detonated, the main magazine, destroying it completely as well as large parts of the surrounding city. Practicable breaches were recorded by the British engineers on 02 January and the city was stormed on 04 January, less than a month after full investment and siege works had begun. The city was captured after fierce street

fighting and the governor retired to the inner citadel with 3000 picked men. This was stormed on 22 January and fell to the British the same day.

The siege of Multan was therefore one of the larger scale and more protracted sieges of the colonial warfare in India, lasting as it did from mid October until the following January. However this is a somewhat inaccurate benchmark and does not stand up to close scrutiny. In reality the length of the siege was dictated far more by the inability of the British to move sufficient troops and artillery to Multan quickly, than by any efforts of the defenders or by the fortifications of the city. The siege truly existed only from the period of proper investment in December, and once the city came under bombardment the actual storming followed just days later.
Of course the lucky mortar round destroying the magazine must also be taken into account. However, even given the delay in storming the inner citadel, the fall of Multan occurred relatively quickly once the British could bring their forces to bear. Indeed the length of the siege was largely dictated by the time taken to move adequate force up the Indus. Multan's best defence had been the geography of the surrounding country rather than its walls or garrison.

Thus the Sikh Wars demonstrated little of the art of siege warfare but they did show the effectiveness of well-prepared field fortifications and the dangers of well-served native artillery. Indeed, although the North West frontier was, and still is, littered with dozens of mud and earth forts and defensive positions, it was the Khalsa Dal who first truly mastered the concept of earth-work field fortifications, much akin to what was becoming more popular in Europe at the same time. Ultimately this would lead to a preference in European warfare for earth work defences as opposed to

masonry, or indeed a combination of both, as at Sevastopol, to combat the effectiveness of large calibre siege guns and later still rifled artillery.

However in India by 1857 the British had begun to move away from the established thinking about siege warfare prominent in Europe. India was controlled largely by garrisons of troops in outdated and old-fashioned forts and strongholds. These troops rested secure in the knowledge that no enemy they were likely to face possessed the engineering skill or technology necessary to oust them from their fortress. Simultaneously, although the British forces in India possessed numerous artillery regiments, their specialist siege artillery was somewhat less proficient. Punitive campaigns against native enemies demanded fast moving, easily deployable horse artillery or light field pieces, not heavy siege guns. Siege artillery was therefore held centrally at major stations such as Agra, Ambala, Ferozepore and Madras.

It was understood in India that heavy siege artillery followed by infantry storm was the key to defeating Asian fortresses quickly. However by 1857 the EIC and Royal Regiments held a complete monopoly throughout India on both fortresses and siege guns. Siege artillery was therefore only likely to be used as part of a pre-planned campaign out-with the three Presidencies, prior to which it could be moved to the departure point of any expeditionary force. It was never expected to be used in response to a sudden need within India itself, so there was no requirement to 'share it around' the military stations.

Of course the flaw in this system, seen with hindsight, was the possibility that the 'secure' fortresses of British India might fall to an enemy already inside their walls and with no need for siege artillery.

The mutiny provided a multitude of sieges, both small and large. Most of these are stories of small European garrisons or groups holding fortified bungalows, entrenchments, or buildings, until help arrived. However there were some larger scale actions such as the sieges of the Lucknow Residency or the Cawnpore Entrenchment. Some historians also talk of the siege of Agra although in reality the British within the fort were never seriously threatened nor ever actually cut off. Although the British remained within the fort for some months and the rebels freely moved in and around the town, no attempt at investment was ever really made. The 'siege' was therefore more of a self-imposed exile for the British troops and residents of the city. Of course it can also be argued that no formal attempt at siege was made for exactly the reasons stated above – few engineers, little or no siege artillery, and the otherwise strong fortifications of the fortress itself. This argument cannot be discounted and it is easy to believe that the rebels, already in control of the city of Agra, and with far easier targets in the surrounding country, saw no reason to attempt a protracted siege of the fort.

In the better-known examples of Lucknow and Cawnpore, the rebels were 'successful' only at Cawnpore, where they prevailed more by treachery than by force of arms. Both these, and many lesser, locations held out against repeated rebel attacks during the course of the mutiny.[139] Indeed very few 'prepared' positions, having survived the initial outbreak of mutiny, actually fell to the rebels. Most that did were

[139] Examples include the fort at Allahabad, Arrah house, Neemuch fort, Rehli fort and conversely the successful rebel defence of Awah in Sept 1858. Brief details of all these actions can be found in Taylor, *A Companion*..pp.10, 16, 247, 285.

either overwhelmed by sheer force of numbers or were abandoned by the British. The fort of Fatehgarh held out for several days against heavy odds before the defences were breached by mines prepared and exploded by native sappers. The garrison attempted to escape in groups but few succeeded and the fort fell.[140]

At Cawnpore, despite the questionable defensive position chosen, Wheeler held out against repeated attacks before his supply situation drove him to negotiate what became the tragedy of the 'massacre at the boats'. Of Agra and Lucknow, only Agra was a true fortress, whilst Lucknow was a fortified residency and a significantly easier nut to crack. The Residency was properly besieged by the rebels but held out until reinforced by Havelock after 87 days. During this time it came under a number of attacks. Several mines, constructed by native sappers were used but the mining effort was disrupted and ultimately defeated by the counter-mining of the British under the Chief Engineer, Captain George Fulton.[141] The garrison was eventually relieved and evacuated by Campbell seven weeks later.

What is of note is the failure to capture most of these positions despite a preponderance of numbers, the presence of mutineer sappers, and significant support from mutineer artillery. The mutineers certainly possessed the technical ability and engineering skill to conduct a siege, as the mining of Fatehgarh proves, but what was lacking was large calibre siege artillery in suitable numbers. Without it the capture of Agra was impossible and that of Lucknow a matter of debate. Mining was only

[140] D G Churcher, article, "Episodes of the Indian Mutiny", *Blackwoods Magazine* May 1900. Details of the uprising at Fatehgarh are given in a report by *The Times* (London Ed) of 03 Nov 1857.
[141] Fulton took over upon the death of Major Anderson on 11 Aug 1857. Fulton himself was mortally wounded on 14 September. His actions in defeating the rebel mines and indeed the use of British mines for offensive operations are discussed by Taylor, *A Companion*.,,p. 133.

suitable if the surrounding countryside and fortress approaches were advantageous to the enemy sappers, which they certainly were not at Agra. As a result Agra was left largely alone whilst success in the siege of Lucknow became as important to the rebels as the siege of Delhi was to the British.

Lucknow, and to a lesser extent Cawnpore, represented the major sieges of Europeans by rebels during the mutiny. Of the sieges conducted by the Europeans themselves, the two largest and best known were Jhansi and Delhi. Jhansi was a small town in Central India, which played a significant, if often overlooked, part in the mutiny. The British garrison of the fort at Jhansi, like Cawnpore, were tricked into surrendering and subsequently massacred. The Rani of Jhansi, another of the civilian leaders of the mutiny, held the fort thereafter for much of the mutiny. Early in 1858 General Sir Hugh Rose marched on Jhansi and the fort was fully invested on 23 March 1858. The siege was interrupted by the Battle of Betwa River on 31 March, during which Rose defeated a rebel force intent on relieving the fort. Jhansi was finally stormed on 3 April and, after vicious and prolonged street fighting, finally fell the next day.

The critical difference between Jhansi and Delhi was the composition of the forces that arrived to besiege them. At Jhansi Sir Hugh Rose arrived at the head of an organised and properly equipped army capable of immediately investing, bombarding, and assaulting the city in much the same way as previous British forces had captured Bhurtpore, Jellalabad, Multan and Ghazni. However, at Delhi, Barnard arrived with a scratch force, poorly organised and equipped, and with no heavy siege artillery. The key difference was the presence of siege artillery. Once it had arrived at Delhi the time frames of bombardment and assault were almost identical to those at Jhansi.

This proved to be the case in most of the sieges conducted by British forces against rebel defenders. If sufficient heavy artillery was available, then the 'siege' was over relatively quickly, but in its absence the rebels might hold out longer.

The imposing fortress of Rahatgarh was held by Muhammad Fazal Khan and a strong garrison of Pathans. It was invested, stormed, and captured in the space of three days by Rose and his Central Indian Field Force in 1858. Similarly the large fort at Chanderi, to the south west of Jhansi, was invested on 7 March 1858. After heavy guns had made a practicable breach, it was stormed and captured on 17 March, just ten days later. [142] Even more telling, the fort of Garhakota near Saugur was considered to be one of the strongest in India. Despite Rose having insufficient strength fully to invest it, its garrison slipped away under cover of darkness and the fort fell without a fight shortly after his arrival.

Conversely the town of Awah was successfully defended by the rebels against a lightly equipped British force under Brigadier General Lawrence who was forced to retire as he could make no impression upon the fortifications on 18 Sept 1858.[143]

Of course it must be remembered that the defenders of besieged positions on both sides during the mutiny did not enjoy the luxury of having the option of negotiation and surrender. In European warfare, generally speaking, once a practicable breach was made in the defences, the besieged governor was expected to surrender and seek terms. If he did not then it was accepted that no quarter would be given by assaulting troops and the town was liable to pillage.

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[142] Both these episodes are described in Thomas Lowe's book, *Central India during the Rebellion of 1857-58* (London 1860).

[143] Taylor, *A Companion...*, p. 24.

The massacre at the boats after the surrender of Wheeler at Cawnpore, or indeed the almost certain execution of surrendered mutineers, ensured that a besieged garrison during the mutiny, on whichever side, was essentially fighting for its life. This is perhaps directly linked to the tenacity of the defence of Lucknow or the days of street fighting that followed the storming of Delhi.

It is therefore reasonable to ask whether the garrisons of Lucknow or Delhi would have surrendered and sought terms, if the nature and intent of their besiegers had been different. Would the British in the Lucknow Residency have held out for so long against a 'civilised' European enemy who offered terms and guaranteed the safety of women and children? Conversely did the mutineers fighting in the streets of Delhi actually fight because they believed they could repulse the British or because of the almost certain death that awaited them upon surrender? The evidence suggests that desperation and the instinct to survive played as great a part in the sieges of the Indian Mutiny as devotion to any flag or religion.

At Delhi, the tactics employed for the siege by Barnard, Reed, and finally Wilson were driven far more by the composition of the DFF than by the defences of the city. Although the Chief Engineer Baird Smith supervised the construction of siege works and defences, much of this was for the defence of the ridge position rather than the capture of the city.[144]

From this it is not unreasonable to suggest that the length of the siege at Delhi

[144] The Institution of Royal Engineers at Chatham holds detailed plans and drawings related to these works as well as other papers of interest in a collection of documents from Baird Smith and his assistant Capt Alex Taylor. Papers of Colonel Baird Smith – Inst RE Chatham.

had little to do with the strength of the city but rather more to do with the weakness of its attackers. Being outnumbered by a native enemy had never prevented British forces from attacking before in India, so why should it have been so at Delhi? Of course the quality of Delhi's defenders could have been seen as better than the average native opponent in India, but the troops of the Khalsa Dal, considered by contemporaries to be superior to most sepoys, had been defeated despite numerical advantages in the past.

Once again the outdated defences of Delhi, as with many Indian cities and forts, were impressive against cavalry and infantry attacks. The very advantage that the EIC had enjoyed until the outbreak of the mutiny was turned against them at Delhi. The ability of outdated defences to hold against poorly equipped armies was again put to the test, except this time it was the DFF that did not possess the necessary equipment to overcome the defences. Like the Afghans before Jellalabad or Lake before Bhurtpore, Barnard and then Wilson did not have the equipment necessary to defeat the defences of the city and thus bring their forces into action.

The DFF would certainly have attacked the mutineer garrison of Delhi if it had met them in the open. Barnard probably and Wilson almost certainly would have attacked a numerically superior native enemy, because that was the way that campaigns in India were conducted. Officers had been educated in pure victories against the odds, such as those of Wellington at Seringapatam and Assaye or Gough during the Sikh Wars. Whilst the lesson was perhaps not always the best one, certainly in Gough's case, the outcome was nevertheless clear – British forces were expected to attack, and overcome, native enemies despite numerical disparity. This

ethos gave rise to the support for an early storm of Delhi by 'coup de main' that a number of Barnard's officers favoured.

The issue at Delhi then returns to the siege train. Once it is accepted that the defences would never have resisted a bombardment by modern siege artillery, the significance of its presence or absence takes on greater importance. The decision to wait for the siege train was undoubtedly the correct one, despite the criticism it generated. Siege artillery guaranteed the fall of Delhi in a way that a bold, but rash, 'coup de main' could not.

From this it can be seen that Wilson was a cautious but patient commander who fully understood the risks his force was taking. Despite this he was almost entirely broken by the time the siege train arrived at the ridge, and from this point onwards the direction of operations fell largely to Baird Smith, Taylor and Nicholson.

Equally the rebel leadership was only too aware of the importance of the siege train. This prompted the major sortie to intercept it that was defeated by Nicholson on 25 August. This was one of the greatest tactical errors of the mutineers; clearly aware of the danger posed by the siege train they sent a sizeable part of the city garrison, seven thousand troops, to intercept it. However they failed to consider that the DFF would have to split its own forces to counter this move, and, when Nicholson departed the ridge with 2500 men the following day, the force on the ridge was reduced to its weakest strength since the siege had begun. Despite this, no serious attack materialised and the force sent to intercept the siege train was defeated with heavy loss. This was a golden opportunity lost by the rebels. By concentrating and coordinating their efforts they had the opportunity of a powerful sortie either against

the siege train or the ridge positions. Success in either would have ended the siege and given them victory. However, instead they hedged and achieved neither.

The subsequent siege and operations have already been discussed in depth in previous chapters and it will be remembered that the city was stormed on 14 September. What is pertinent here is the method of attack. Having become more of a formal siege than was typical of Indian campaigns, the storming of 14 September also followed more European lines, with several columns being used to escalade the breaches and bastions at different points. This was similar to earlier sieges within Europe. As Christopher Duffy writes:

The very few successful escalades of the later period had a number of significant features in common: the attempt always took the defenders by surprise, whether in the timing or in the place of the attack; the troops came on in several columns, so that at least one of the detachments had a chance of breaking in at a weakly defended sector; and the troops, once they reached the rampart walls hastened off to right and left and opened the gates to the main forces waiting outside (Prague 1741; Badajoz 1812; Bergen-op-Zoom (1814), despite the later repulse; Delhi 1857).[145]

What is interesting is that Duffy treats these earlier sieges in Europe with the single addition of the later siege at Delhi in one grouping. Certainly he is correct in that all these operations were escalades, but what is more relevant is that, whilst this was perhaps common in early 19th Century Europe, it was less so in India.

[145] Duffy, *Fire and Stone..*, p. 120.

Delhi in 1857 appears to be an example of a European army using proper siege methods and engineering over a period of time to defeat a native fortress. However, this is not the case.

In India the normal pattern of operations was to arrive, invest, bombard to create a breach, and finally storm the breach and secure the objective. This process rarely took more than two to three weeks and equally rarely did it require elaborate siege works and sapping. However at Delhi there was no proper investment and there was a significant gap between the arrival of the DFF and the bombardment of the defences. Despite this, once the siege train had arrived the pattern was exactly as with other sieges – bombard, storm, secure.

What then was different at Delhi in 1857? It has been suggested that the size and capability of the sepoy garrison gave the British pause; equally the old but still impressive defences of the city were a significant deterrent to early assault; finally, the relatively weak composition of the British force may also have been a factor. However could not these factors also be said to have applied at Seringapatam or Ahmednuggur. Moreover why were similar elaborate and protracted sieges not seen at Ghazni, or Multan, and later in the mutiny at Jhansi?

The conclusion that suggests itself is that the siege of Delhi was only protracted and elaborate because of the weakness of the British and not the strength of the rebels. Had Barnard's force arrived on the ridge in June accompanied by siege artillery, then the siege would have been conducted like any other in India and the city would probably have been stormed later that month. The strength of the garrison alone would not have prevented the attack, as the aborted assault planned for 13 June,

even without a breach in the defences, had shown. However as this proved impossible and the days passed, it became clear that the sepoys would have time to prepare their defences and organise themselves before a siege train arrived. The British, without the strength to attack the intact defences, and just holding onto their own ridge positions themselves, were forced into planning a longer and more protracted operation than was usual. This was not because such an operation was actually necessary to defeat the defences of Delhi, but rather because there was little else to do until the siege train arrived other than plan the assault and defend the ridge. Once the siege guns arrived operations at Delhi took on the same pattern as those that had captured Ghazni or Multan, and in a similar timescale.

It can be seen that siege warfare in India was not the same elaborate art as it was in Europe. It was not required to be so, simply because there were no technologically adept opponents competing in fortress-building innovation. After the defeat of the Sikhs, the EIC and Royal regiments controlled all of the fortresses and also all of the equipment necessary to capture them. Siege artillery was therefore not in great demand after the Sikh wars. Outmoded fortresses continued to be garrisoned because they provided more than adequate protection against the technically inferior enemies of the EIC. The older style Indian fortresses were more than a match for any force devoid of modern heavy artillery. The flaw was of course the reliance upon the sepoys to provide garrisons in these fortresses without European troops in attendance. Once these native troops revolted the British lost most of their fortresses and strongholds in a very short space of time.

The difficulty at Delhi was twofold; the British had no siege artillery readily available for the small force that marched on the city, and equally they could not provide a force large enough to capture the city without it.

Ultimately the protracted nature of the siege of Delhi was caused by the weaknesses of the British rather than the strength of the city. Whilst the achievements of the DFF in holding the ridge and eventually capturing the city should not be overlooked, they are no greater an achievement than the other actions considered above. Had Barnard's force been properly equipped, the siege of Delhi would more than likely have only occupied a short paragraph in the history of the mutiny, much as Multan does in histories of the Sikh Wars.

In retrospect, and against convention, it would be more accurate to say that the siege of Delhi, rather than lasting the three and a half months normally accepted, actually lasted only two weeks. In other words it truly began only with the arrival of the siege train which precipitated the standard pattern of arrive, bombard, storm, secure, that the British were used to. The British inability to bring the proper force to bear was a failing which turned what should have been a routine operation into an 'epic saga' of the mutiny.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has shown that Delhi, almost certainly by design, was the early focal point of the Indian Mutiny. It is apparent that at least some rudimentary pre-planning of the military insurrection took place with regard to the Meerut and Delhi garrisons. Equally the evidence suggests the collusion of at least some members of the Royal Court of Bahadur Shah in the attempts to establish an alternative to British rule under the Moghal banner. This fledgling attempt to turn a military mutiny into a more widespread and popular war of independence, although ultimately a failure, was one of the root causes of the rapid spread and prolonged nature of the conflict. The civil disturbances, which accompanied the military mutiny, were essentially a product of the breakdown in British control rather than a simultaneous civil revolt, and were driven far more by notions of personal gain than of national independence. Similarly the thesis has provided evidence to suggest that the selective use of brutal atrocities by a relative minority, coupled with an exaggerated perception of the threat towards native religions, forced the majority of sepoys to become involved in a mutiny that was far bloodier and vicious than that hitherto experienced. As a result, once they were committed, there was little opportunity to draw back and negotiate an end to the mutiny and a return to the British fold. This contradicts the widely held view of many historians who have claimed that the mutiny was a spontaneous and popular revolt which enjoyed a more devoted and widespread support from the sepoys than had hitherto been the case in earlier mutinies.

The thesis challenges the view that the mutiny was a spontaneous outbreak caused largely by the supposed threat to native religions. The evidence presented suggests that the issue of religion was just one factor, of several, that was manipulated by a small number of agitators. Attempting to generate spontaneous outbreaks at a

single station that would then spread, they failed at Berhampore and Barrackpore during the early part of 1857. They finally succeeded by exploiting the opportunity offered by the court martial of the 3rd NLC troopers at Meerut. This, in conjunction with the proximity to Delhi and the ease of communication between the two, allowed the outbreak at Meerut to spread rapidly to Delhi. Certainly the ringleaders, despite their planning, were also opportunists, and there can be little doubt that the opportunity offered at Meerut was an ideal one for their purposes where Barrackpore and Berhampore had not been.

Delhi then, by a combination of planning and good fortune, became the rallying point and focus of the mutiny and so its recapture by the British took on such great significance. The generally held view of the campaign at Delhi from June to September 1857 is one of a small British force gallantly containing a far larger mutineer force before finally storming and retaking the city. The 'siege' was seen as a drawn out epic of the mutiny, lasting as it did for so long in a country more used to swift and victorious British military achievements. The length of the siege was attributed to the strength of the mutineers and the defences of the city. This thesis has shown that this is a somewhat 'romanticised' version of events, woven in part to cover up inadequacies in British command and control, manpower, and equipment availability. In reality the evidence shows that it was the British who spent most of the period under siege and it was their weakness, and not the mutineer strength, that prolonged operations. In particular the lack of an adequate siege train prolonged the siege far more than any other single factor. Had the DFF arrived on the ridge with a suitable siege train, then the action and Delhi would probably have lasted no more than two or three weeks.

It has been clearly shown that numerical inferiority, even against an enemy within fortifications, was not a justification for British officers to fail to attack native enemies. Whilst it is true that the British had not faced their own sepoys on this scale before, nevertheless the tactics of direct and early assault had been used against the Khalsa Dal, arguably a more disciplined and effective force than the sepoy armies. Against native foes, if a British commander could bring his force to action, then he would do so. However, without siege artillery, the successive commanders of the DFF were unable to achieve this, and the initiative was handed to the mutineers until early September.

The arrival of the siege train allowed the DFF to resort to the tried and tested methods of British colonial warfare when faced with an Asian fortress held by a native enemy. These methods, as had been proved many times before, in India and Afghanistan, succeeded and the city fell. It follows then that the success at Delhi, though more protracted, was essentially the same as previous successes in India. This therefore supports the somewhat controversial conclusion that the success at Delhi is no more impressive or unusual than earlier triumphs in India.

This thesis has attempted to use the events at Delhi as a tool to analyse and deconstruct the course of the mutiny as a whole and its eventual failure. Success at Delhi, as with the mutiny in general, owed as much to rebel failures as it did to British achievements. The lack of discipline under fire of some sepoy formations compared with their British contemporaries; the absence of a centralised rebel staff compared with the robust British system; the lack of suitably qualified and experienced senior rebel commanders as opposed to the British, all are critical factors. Equally the failure to generate widespread civilian support, or indeed to incite the sepoys of the two other Presidencies to mutiny, can be attributed not only to the robust British

response to the mutiny in Bengal but also to the poor co-ordination and lack of centralised leadership of the mutineers.

Therefore the reasons the British were successful at Delhi were largely the same reasons why they were successful in putting down the mutiny as a whole. More importantly these same factors can be traced back through the plethora of previous British victories in India and the North West Frontier.

It would be unfair to suggest that the recapture of Delhi in September 1857 was not a great victory. Wilson and his Delhi Field Force achieved a remarkable feat, but the key conclusion to be drawn from this research is that it was no more remarkable than the earlier victories of Clive, Lake, or Wellesley. The successful defence of the ridge against repeated attacks was the greater achievement more than the capture of the city which, had it not been delayed, would have been almost routine for a British force in India fifty years earlier. Instead the story of the DFF storming Delhi has taken on the mantle of a military epic which overshadows the true story. What should have been the remarkable story of the siege of the DFF on the Delhi ridge has been subsumed by an overplayed story of a great struggle against the odds and an 'impossible' victory to recapture the city.

The British were not supermen; they were simply better trained, organised, and motivated than their sepoy enemies. They benefited greatly from a selection of gifted junior officers, the so-called young men of India, whose charisma, leadership and self-assurance the rebels could never hope to match. These advantages, coupled with the patent weaknesses of the rebel side, ensured that there was only ever one possible outcome at Delhi in 1857, and it was as certain as Clive's victory 100 years earlier, and for essentially the same reasons.

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Abbreviations:

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BL-OIOC	British Library – Oriental and India Office collection
CSAS	Centre for South Asian Studies – University of Cambridge
DCV	Documents – Various
FDSC (NAI)	Foreign Department Secret Consultations (National Archives of India)
JSAHR	Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research
MSL	Manuscript letters
MSN	Manuscript notes/diaries
NAI	National Archives of India
NAM	National Army Museum
PRO	Public Record Office
RUSI	Royal United Services Institute

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Greathed W W H	DCV	Greathed papers NAM 6711/1
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Hills Lt J	MSL	NAM 6301/70
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Lyall A	MSL various Lyall letters / papers OIOC

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Coghill Lt K	DCV Coghill Papers CSAS
Gye Col A H	DCV Gye papers – in particular *Evening Mail* (London Ed) article "The Siege of Delhi" CSAS
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