

## **The British Indian Army: the History of Formation and Battle Route (Based on the Materials of Russian and Foreign Historiography)**

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**Abstract:** In anniversary years of the termination of two wars, it becomes evident the activity of the study of different historical aspects. Today a considerable interest in the study of the British India phenomenon has been revived among the academic historians. Modern home and foreign researchers put forward the topic of history of formation of the fighting route of the British Indian army as interesting and original. For the last 10 years, it has appeared the studies on the topic of our concern that need generalization and systematization. This study deals with the understanding of the history of the British Indian army, analysis and appreciation of the statement and study of the claimed topic in the works of the modern home and Foreign historians. The researchers of the study consider how the researchers have characterized the reasons, conditions and circumstances of the formation and organization of the British Indian army, description of the course, results and consequences of its fighting route and services.

**Key words:** British India, the British Indian army, the history of formation and fighting route, circumstances, fighting route

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The mighty and mysterious India under the Crown of the British Empire was considered as the most resplendent brilliant. India supplied its small British centre of the empire with raw materials and work force. Britain had repressed the revolts and stirred up one peoples of India against the others for 10 years. It was the colonial army that was called upon crushing mutinies. The Indian army of the Britons represented a well-organized military force that could be quite used outside Hindustan as well. Several publications of the time prevailing upon the brilliance and grandeur of the Indian armies in the colonial British empire have not paled deal with the history and battle route.

The official name of the army was "The Indian Army". In contemporary literature the prefix "British" is used to our differentiating it from the army of India of the time. The meaning of the term "The Indian Army" has been changed with the course of time. In the years 1858-1894, it was informal generalized name for the armies of Presidencies. Since 1895, the term "The Indian Army" had been used to designate the army of the British India government.

British India came into the war simultaneously with Great Britain. The Indian troops took part in actions in Europe, the Mediterranean, Africa and in the Middle East. The army of British India was one of the numerous largest voluntary army in the world history.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

**The main body:** Concerning the history of the British army organization let us note the following. The major part of India was the British colony, the rest part comprised about 600 principalities it had bilateral treaties with England and was a member of the British Empire the biggest of the countries ever existed for the mankind's history with the colonies on the all inhabited continents. Pax Britannica (by analogy with Lat. Pax Romana) the period of dominating of the British Empire in the international relations beginning with the battle of Waterloo in and ending World War One (1914-1918). The peak of the British power fell on the Victorians (1837-1901).

The British territories in India had been ruled by the British East India Company till the mid of XIX century till 1707. The English East India Company had been a corporate enterprise, created in 1600 by decree of Elizabeth I and accorded enormous privileges for trade operations in India. By means of the East India Company there was a British colonization of India and some of the Orient. During the first hundred years of its activity the company focused on the operations in the India subcontinent. In the second half of XVIII century, the company extended its dominion by means of administering the India territories or directly or via local puppet governors under threat of India army field forces that consisted mainly of Indian mercenaries sepoys.

In terms of administration the British territories in India were divided into three Presidencies each of them had its own military force with generalized name "Armies of Presidencies". In the middle of XVIII century, each of three Presidencies formed its own army: Bengal, Madras and the Army of Bombay. The British Crown sent units of standing army named "royal regiment" or "His Majesty's regiments" to India to support the armies of the company.

Robert Clive (1725-1774) was the first who formed Indian military units. He was a British general and official who promoted the dominance of the British East India Company over the South India and Bengal. He initiated the extension of power of Britain in the territory of subcontinent that led to creation of the British India. After the victory in Plessis he was called by the title of baron with triumphal epithet "Plessis". Clive being a colonial figure, a governor of Bengal in 1757-1760 and 1764-1767, played an enormous role in annexation of India to the British colonial possessions. In 1757 in Bengal Presidency, he decided to organize the battalions of "sepoys" that were armed, dressed and trained as "redcoats" and were in command of the British officers. In the Madras Presidency that idea was realized in 1759 and in Bombay in 1767.

From time immemorial India was divided into many small principalities being always at war with each other. The English who occupied India were quick to realize the advantage of weapon and guns over leather shields and savage-looking sabres. In alienation from the country, it was not advantageous to lose the British soldiers and the sepoys became the main striking power. With up-to-date arms, though their standards in training did not reach the British standards, they got regular considerable payment. No wonder, it was a real dream for the local poor to join the services of the British.

The sepoys as hired soldiers in colonial India were recruited by the European colonizers, mostly by the English, from the local population. The term was originally used in the British India army and before in the British East India Company for the ranks and it has been used to designate rank and file in the armies of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh so far.

The troop was conscripted from the representatives of one and the same caste from certain countries and villages. In 1784, the regiments of regular cavalry were formed, the regular cavalry was organized according to the traditional system for India states. The sub-units of indigenous artillery and indigenous sappers were formed. In between 1796 and 1804, it was introduced a system of regiments consisting of two battalions with 22 British officers in each. Since in reality, the battalions were weakly connected with each other and even inward one

regiment they did not feel as a single sub-unit, then in 1824 an opposite idea was taken and the basic sub-unit was not the regiment but the battalion.

In 1857, it was started the rebellion against the British East India Company. The sepoys became a motive power of the greatest Indian revolution of the colonial period the Sepoy rebellion in 1857-1859. The Mutiny (in modern historiography the Indian popular uprising or the First Indian war for independence) the uprising of the Indian soldiers against drastic colonialist policy of the English. The sepoys from "privileged estate" had turned into "cannon-fodder" before the beginning of the uprising as by that time Britain had been already fighting in South-East Asia almost for 20 years running. All in all, grievances against colonial policy of the English changed the region into "powder keg", it was casus to require for mutiny.

Cause to rebellion was new Enfield's rifle with capsule bolt. The cartridge was to be bitten off, supposedly to be soaked with mix of beef fat and lard (a cow was a sacred animal in Hinduism and a pig unclean in Islam). Though, the sub-units of sepoys were strengthened adhering to mixed principles, it did not prevent the collusion between the Hindu and the Mussulmen. It is interesting, there was "forecast" that "the East India Company will have been ruling for 100 years" (from the very beginning of the battle in Plessis in 1757).

The rebellion determined the end of the British East India Company governing and resulted in its substitution by direct rule of the English crown. In 1857 r, the English parliament adopted the act of better government according to which the company would have delegated its administrative functions to the British crown since 1858. In 1874, the company was liquidated. The British Empire set up a direct administrative control almost over the whole territory of the South Asia. The settled system in the English-speaking sources was stated to name "British Raj". This system used the traditional feudal organization of India but the supreme suzerain of the rulers of certain Indian regions was the British crown. Such organization was finally consolidated in 1876 by the crowning of the English Queen Victoria as the Empress of India.

The rebellion provoked a tempestuous wave of the most miscellaneous comments, both in the English press and literature and outside the country, particularly in France where the definite circles supported the alliance with the Russian Empire with the purpose of ousting Great Britain from Asia.

Britain saw the Russian Empire as its rival in the colonial expansion. Fearing influence of the Russian on Persia, the Company began to turn up the pressure on

Afghanistan in the years 1839-1842, the First English-Afghan war went through. Russia instituted protectorate over the Bokharan khanate and joined Samarkand in 1868, the rivalry between two empires began for power over the Middle Asia, in terms of Anglo-Saxon tradition it was called "High play".

After rebellion in 1860, all European regiments of the Presidency armies joined the British army and the indigenous units continued to be in the framework of the armies of the Presidencies and the European officers at the serve considered to be not the officers of the British army but the officers of Bengal, Madras and Bombay armies, respectively. The system of conscription had been changed: not only Mussulmen were conscripted but the representatives of so called "martial races": the Marathi, the Rajpoots, the Sikhs, the Gurkhas, Pashtos, the Garkhvals, the Mohyals, the Dogrs, the Jats and the Baluchi.

In October 26, 1894, the Army department made Order No. 981, according to which since April 1, 1895 three armies of Presidencies had joined in the united Indian army. The Armed Forces of the Indian army were divided into four Commands: North, South, West and East. In 1902 Commander in Chief of the Indian armies was appointed field marshal lord Herbert Kitchener who brought about the reforms (in 1909 not getting on with viceroy Curzon, he came back to England and was appointed a member of the Defense Board). In addition to the Commands, in 1903-1909, there were 8 divisions formed: the 1st (Peshawar), the 2nd (Rawalpindi), the 3d (Lahore), the 4th (Quetta), the 5th (Mhousk), the 6th (Pune), the 7th (Meratk) and the 8th (Lakhnau). Towards the beginning of World War I the 9th (Sekunderabadh) division had been formed.

As a result of the reforms Kitchener the Indian army had the structure similar to the structure of the British army, however, its ammunition was much worse. The division of the Indian army consisted of three brigades of four-battalion staff. In each brigade, there were three battalions from the Indian army and one from the British army. The Indian battalions were often segregated, the companies were formed with regard to tribe, caste and religion. The traditional trouble of the Indian army was shortage of artillery (after sepoys rebellion there had been only 12 batteries of mountain artillery remained), therefore the Royal artillery was passed on to the divisions of the Indian army. The ranks in the Indian army were considered less prestigious those in the British army but the payment there was considerably higher. As the result of it the officers of the Indian army could live on their salary without being in need of the extra sources of income. In Quetta, there was command-personnel college

opened to provide the army with the officers knowing local conditions. The conscription continued on a voluntary basis with consideration for religious and caste distinctions.

In the years of the First World War since 1914 Herbert Kitchener had been the Minister for War in the Great Britain. On this position he could sufficiently strengthen the British army for account of volunteers and in January 1916, he introduced compulsory military service. Since the beginning of positional war he concentrated his efforts on developing artillery industry and increasing munition production. From the military point of view he was adherent to the operations of the secondary theatres.

By World War I, the size of the army had been 155 thousand men and by November 1918-573 thousand. In all, for the years of the First World War one and a half millions volunteer served in the Indian army.

After World War I, there was the process of "indianization" of the Indian army. The Royal military academy in Sandhurst began to admit the cadets-Indians who after their graduation they received officership and were commissioned officers commanding the British sub-units. Owing to clumsiness, demonstrated by the one-battalion regiments in 1922 the Indian army was reorganized. In 1932, the Indian military academy in Dehra Dun was opened, it made possible to improve the officer personnel training.

There is an interesting aspect concerning award honours. For example, in April 17, 1837 the East India Company instituted the Order of British India as honourable award of the British Empire (1837-1947). Its destination was to award indigenous officers for "long, faithful and irreproachable service". After uprising of the sepoys the authority of the East India Company was nullified, but the order was preserved and achieved the state status in 1859. The Indian officers serving in the British army for a long time continued to be awarded with the Order. Usual time in the army after which they were awarded was 20-30 years but there were cases, when an officer was awarded for heroic participation in a certain company. In 1939, the statute of the order was changed by royal edict. Two order classes had been adopted. The Order of the second class could be awarded to the officers of the Indian army and of the armed forces of the Indian principalities of the frontier troops and of the military policy. The holder of the first order class could be only a serviceman awarded before with Order of class II. The holder of the order could add to his name the abbreviation OBI and in oral speech the title "bahadur" ("hero") for class II and "sardar bahadur" (heroic leader) for class I.

Besides principal order which was awarded to the Indian officers there existed medal modification for non-commissioned officers and private soldiers for signal service at times of war. The Indian Orders were introduced by the following: The Most Exalted Order of the Star of India (1861), The Most Exalted Order of the Indian Empire (1878), The Empire Order of the Indian Crown (1878).

The orders mentioned above referred to the British Rajah (governing) and now they are not used as the access to these orders has been ceased since 1947, the independence of India.

Concerning the battle route of the British Indian army, let us note the following. The wars in which the armies of the Presidencies took part after India under the rule of the British Crown: the Second Opium war (1856-1860), the Anglo-Ethiopian War (1867-1868), the Second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-1880), the Anglo-Egyptian war (1882), the Third Anglo-Burman war (1885-1887). The wars in which the Indian army participated: the Mahdists' rebellion (1898), Yihetuan rebellion (1900-1901), The British expedition to Tibet (1903-1904), The First World War (1914-1918), Intervention into the Transcaucasia (1918-1920), the British intervention in Central Asia (1918-1920), the Third Anglo-Afghan war (1919), The Second World War (1939-1945).

The main research interest is concentrated on the analysis of the two world wars. India took part in the First World War and contributed to the victory of the Entente. 1.5 millions Indians (mainly, the Sikhs and the Gurkhs) immediately took part in the battle actions of the British army all over the world fighting equally with the soldiers from such dominions as Canada and Australia and incurred sizable losses. Hundreds of thousands of civilian residents had been impressed for the works in the immediate battle area. In the course of the war in India 1 440,437 people had been mobilized, about 1 million of the Indian military personnel were sent outwards the British India, of them 64,449 military personnel had been killed, 128,000 men had been wounded and 11, 264 men had been taken prisoners.

Announcement of England of war with Germany in August 1914 exerted great influence on moving events in India. It was automatically involved into the war on the side of metropolitan country and its wartime allies.

The Indian army fought against the German armies in the Western line in East Africa. The Indian armies took an active part in battling in Egypt and Mesopotamia against the forces of the Ottoman Empire. In 1914 r, the British India army was the most sizable voluntary army in the world (240,000 military personnel).

In terms of organization, it had been formed several expeditionary Indian corps. After World War I broke out the Indian headquarters could send 2 cavalry and 2 infantry divisions to France for fighting. "The Indian expeditionary corps A" had been formed of those four divisions under Major General James Willcoke's command. In 1915, all Indian infantries were redeployed from France to Egypt. After withdrawal of infantry troops at the West front two cavalry divisions had remained. They were in reserve waiting for breakthrough of position line.

In 1914, the governor of the British East Africa requested help for fighting against the German colonial troops from the German East Africa. It had been decided to form "the Indian expeditionary corps B" under Major General Arthur Iteken's command to deploy in battle against German armies in East Africa. "Expeditionary corps C" consisted of: a infantry division, two infantry brigades, engineering subdivisions and elements of mountain artillery.

"The Indian expeditionary corps C" had been formed for actions in East Africa. The staff of "expeditionary corps C" included: a infantry brigades, five infantry battalions, the 29th infantry regiment and miscellaneous formations of volunteers from different Indian princedoms. The Indian forces took part in the battle in Kilimanjaro, in the course of battling the Indian regiment came under fire of the German troops and incurred sizable losses. As a result, the Indian troops made a retreat without having tried on the assigned tasks.

The Indian expeditionary corps D had been formed for hostilities in Mesopotamia under General John Nixon's command for the purpose of defense of the British Al Basrah oil derricks. After the first battles broke out in Mesopotamia against the Turkish troops the Indian armies under Arthur Barrett's and then Charles Thousand's commands advanced in the heart of Mesopotamia. However in November 1915 the Indian forces suffer a defeat because of difficulties in supplies. In April 1916, the British-Indian garrison was forced to capitulate through lack of supply of provisions and epidemic. The Ottoman armies had captured 9000 Indian military personnel. The Mesopotamia company became the main front for the Indian army during the First World war. In the course of hostilities in Mesopotamia 11,012 Indian military personnel had been killed, 3985 men had died of wounds, 12,678 men had died of diseases, 13,492 had been taken prisoners and reported missing and 51,836 men had received wounds.

"The Indian expeditionary corps E" were formed at the beginning of 1918 after two Indian cavalry divisions

having been transported from the West front to Palestine. The cavalry brigade consisting of three uhlan regiments from the princedoms of Hyderabad, Mysore and Jodhpur had joined those two divisions. The 3rd and 7th infantry divisions had moved from Mesopotamia to the Palestinian front.

In 1914 in Egypt "the Indian expeditionary corps F" consisting of the 10 and 11th Indian infantry divisions were formed. The task of the military force was to defend the Suez Canal against the Turkish troops. In January-February 1915, the Indian sub-units jointly with the other British forces repelled the attack of the Ottoman armies to the Suez Canal. In 1915, the 11th infantry division was disbanded and in 1916 the 10th division was also disbanded and transported to the other fronts.

In April 1915 "the Indian expeditionary corps G" were maneuvered to the peninsula Gallipoli to take part in Dardanelles operation. After failure in battling the brigade was transported to Egypt. In Dardanelles operation time, the losses of the 29th brigade had accounted for 1358 killed and 3421 wounded.

As World War II broke out in 1939 the viceroy of India, lord Littlego, announced the war against Germany without consulting the Hindu. It made many representatives of the Indian national congress resign in protest. At the same time, the Muslim league supported the British military efforts. The British government tried to attract the Hindu-nationalists to support Britain in return for promises of future independence, however, summit talks to the Congress failed. The Empire turned out to be incapable of ceasing the drive of the civil insubordination, neglected by Mahatma Gandhi, requiring for immediate withdrawal of the British from India.

On account of the arrest of practically all leaders of the Congress a significant influence passed to Subhash Bose, one of the leaders of the Indian movement for independence, who abandoned the Congress in 1939 because of the differences in opinion. Bose started cooperating with the countries of the "axis", striving for liberating India from the British by force.

The Hindu-German Anti-British activity gathered pace. In the course of the hostilities, the state of the German troops worsened and the leader of SS Henrich Himmler ordered to conscript o the representatives of "non-German" and "non-Aryan" peoples. So in SS the volunteers of the Slavonic, Muslim, Asian and African peoples had appeared, accounting for 22 Foreign divisions. The Indian legion Wehrmacht the Legion "Independent India" had been formed from the British army prisoners of the Indian origin, captured in North Africa.

With the support of the Japanese Subhash Bose formed so called the Indian national army, levied from the Indian captives in Singapore, mainly. Collaborationist for Japanese administration "Azad Hind" was announced "the government of India" by Bose.

Himmler initially planned to involve the volunteers in the battles for independence of India but the plans remained the plans and the legionary having been trained hastily in Germany moved to defend Europe. In 1944, the subdivision was transported to France with the purpose of defending so called Atlantic Wall.

The fortune of the Indians of German and Japanese line ended sad. The major part of the SS-legionary were trying to cross Switzerland in hope to take cover in a neutral territory but were captured by the French and Americans. The captives were handed to the British to deal as with betrayers. The former legionary were imprisoned in Delhi and the most severe were shot as betrayers.

The Indian national army capitulated by liberation Singapore from the Japanese. In early 1945 as a result of aggravation of the situation at the fronts Bose tried to move to Japan but died in air disaster near Taiwan in August 18. Circumstances of the death of Subhash Chandra Bose has remained unknown so far. The Indian explorers could not find the wreck of the crashed plane that issued the challenge of Bose's afterlife. According to one of the unconfirmed version, Subhash Chandra Bose might be captured by the soviet secret service and died in captivity.

In that way the "glorious" battle route of the Indian national army came to end. Of them 24000 had been killed, reported missing and not found later on, 3000 had died of wounds, 3,500 had died in captivity.

Nevertheless for the years of World War II the strength of the Indian army had increased from 205,000 men to 2.5 millions, having become the largest voluntary army in the history. Besides numerous new infantry corps and divisions, two tank and one parachute-landing divisions had been formed. In matters of control, training and armament the Indian army gained great independence. In war years in its service there were often the types of weapon different from those used in the British army. Though, the military actions did not affect India directly, the world wars had exerted enormous influence on its development. India had become the main colonial home front on which England was relying taking part in wars.

In the end of 1945 justice was dispensed to all soldiers of the National army who provoked mass unrest in India. In January 1946, a series of mutinies occurred in the army that began with the mutiny of the Hindu being at

service of Royal Air Force and dissatisfied at too slow repatriation. In February 1946, the mutiny in the Royal MNF in Bombay occurred as well and then the other mutinies in Calcutta, Madras and Karachi.

The Labour government in Britain has realized that the country, wasted by the Second World War does not have nor the international support nor the support of the local power to keep its hold over India standing on the brink of a precipice of intercommunity disturbances. Near the beginning of the year 1947, Britain announced its intention of withdrawing the forces from India not later than in June 1948.

Participation of India in war demonstrated once more its significance for British Empire and elevated hopes of the Indians to receive the rights to autonomy. During the both wars India was supporting the British military efforts but the growing opposition of the local residents to the colonizers and attenuation of the centre of the empire led the English ruling to collapse.

After the partition occurred in 1947 of the British India near two third of the former Indian army joined the army of the Indian Union and one third the army of dominion Pakistan. The British units had been withdrawn from the territories of the former British India by February 28, 1948. Overwhelming majority of the Mussulmen being at service at the Indian army, joined the army of Pakistan. For the scarcity of the proficient officers, several hundreds of the British officers had remained serving in Pakistan according to the contracts by the beginning of the 1950s.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Summary:** As a result of our research, on the basis of the analysis of the concrete historical, source and historiographical material, we have come to certain conclusions. Special investigations touch upon definite aspects and common conceptual sides of the proposed subject.

In soviet times it was published a series of research works among the researchers of which are the researches by Goldberg (1951). The works of the soviet period were often of opportunistic ideological character of the analysis of many aspects of the claimed subject. Alexander Vladimirovich Raikov was fully engaged in investigating this subject that has been fruitfully published at present time (Raikov, 1984).

Modern home researchers have determined the new level of the investigation. For example, the topic is touched on in the works of the experts in English Marina Pavlovna Eisenstadt (the Institute of oriental studies of

RAS), Svetlana Yevgeniyevna Sidorova (Moscow State University named after M.V. Lomonosov) (Eisenstadt, 2007). It is noteworthy that the similar topic is highlighted in the English language in the recent publication of the authors of the present article Gusel Ferdinandovna Mratkhuzina and Yelena Sergeyevna Maslova (Kazan Federal University) (Mrathuzina and Maslova, 2015).

The Foreign historiography is represented by the names of the authoritative scholars, who analyze the history of the colonial Empire of Great Britain and whose works have been actively reissued in the Russian language. Among them are: the Indian historians Narendra-Krishna Singh, Anil Chandra Banerjee, Sinharaja Tammita-Delgoda (Sinkha and Banerdy, 1994), the English-Palm Datt, Adam Cramb, Robert Seeley (Palm Datt, 1995).

Let us note, we have used the literature in the original (English) language. In the first place these are the works of the foreign philologists of English and specialists in Indian culture: the English Chappell (2005), the Indian Pati (1996), who analyze various aspects of the subject of our interest in their monographs on the basis of various documents.

We have used the materials of multivolume publication "Constitutions of the Bourgeois Countries. The British Empire. India" (1996). The Act of the government system of India (Anonymous, 1996) as the sources of the documentary character.

We have used the works of the greatest leaders of India and Great Britain Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Winston Churchill whose works have been recently reedited (Gandi, 2009) as the sources of private origin category. It is reasonable to use their works on the Indian issue in the imperial politics of Great Britain and their personal position in settlement of a number of problems of the epoch designate, description of the history and significance of the British army marches.

This complex material has certainly contributed into interpretation of our topic to a considerable extent. Though our list is not final and mostly, we represent the complex that turned out to be available for research.

Thus, on the basis of the integral source, historiographic and historical and science analysis the works of the home and foreign researchers of the present time cover essential particular features of the phenomenon of the British India, interpret in a new way many aspects of this phenomenon in history of India as the history of creation, organization and battle route and fortune of the British India army.

## CONCLUSION

From our point of view, the present investigation should be built on pragmatic basis, proceeding from the necessity to take into account new realia. Especially important is the last V. Putin's visit to India, as it was taken in certain distinctly changed conditions both as of regional and global character. It is difficult to overestimate closer relations between Russia and India from the viewpoint of geopolitics. Today mutual relations are to be appreciated going beyond the scope of the commercial, cultural and other contracts and to be comprehended as the Russian-Indian potential of exactly strategic plan at the opportunity of working out joint military-political projects.

In the opinion, the claimed subject has scientific and social and political significance. The performed concrete historical and historiographical analysis requires in further subject study to give opportunity to extend and intensify the investigation.

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