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## The Khyber Rifles: The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Native Guardians of the British Indian Empire

### Introduction

The British Imperial Government raised rifles and militias in the strategic Tribal Belt consisting of the local tribesmen for performing military service during a time of need, as opposed to a regular professional force and a full time military personnel. These militias were supposed to serve in their own territories for limited time, supported by regular army during military expeditions in Tribal Belt. The British after launching more than forty punitive expeditions against tribesmen had come to the conclusion that the recruitment of local tribesmen in militias would not only serve their strategic interest of buying the loyalties of tribesmen which was considered vital for the success of its policy in the Great Game but it would also ensure peace and tranquility in the volatile region. The British first raised Khyber Rifles comprised of different Afridi tribes of Khyber, an irregular force which used its own weapons for safeguarding historic Khyber Pass, a legendary force which not only served in Khyber but also in other regions and earned laurels for its fighting skills and courage. The Khyber Rifles became the source of inspiration for the birth of other militias in Tribal Belt which particularly served the interests of the Viceroy Lord Curzon's Tribal Policy of pacification and contentment.

The legendary Khyber Rifles raised by the Imperial British Government for the protection and security of strategic Khyber Pass in the 19<sup>th</sup> century comprised mainly of the tribesmen of Khyber. The Khyber Pass had strategic importance in British policy of gaining firm foothold in Tribal Belt. But instead of stationing regular troops on the inhospitable and dangerous cliffs that tower over the road, the British came up with an ingenious scheme: why not to recruit the local tribesmen into the fold, offering them the incentive of paid employment in the Government of India plus the freedom to use their weapons with impunity? After all, the Pakhtuns were cognizant of every sniper's nest above the pass like the back of their hands, and their long-barrel matchlocks could easily out-range British breech-loading Sniders. Thus was born the rag-tag embryo of what was to become the Khyber Rifles, the guardians of the Khyber Pass. This native force successfully utilized the fighting skills of the tribesmen for the British cause in the Tribal Belt. Khyber Rifles rendered such valuable services to the Imperial Government that it became the pioneer of the other tribal militias and scouts i.e. Samana Rifles, Kurram Militia and Waziristan Militia which were raised for maintaining peace and tranquility in Tribal Belt. The Khyber Rifles and other militia and scouts raised on the model of Khyber Rifles were the strategic part of the new Frontier policy inaugurated by Viceroy Lord Curzon. These native forces were in forefront of successfully implementing the new Frontier security policy. This article will trace the history of the high and low points of Khyber Rifles during the British Raj.

### Khyber as Monarch of Passes

The celebrated Khyber Pass located in the southern zone of the Hindu Kush rises 3,600 feet above sea level, a barren, rock-strewn wasteland swept in winter by blasts of icy spindrift, baked in summer by temperatures that soar above 110F, is described by C.G Robertson as the "Monarch of Passes"<sup>1</sup>. Scholars claim that Khyber is a word of ancient Hebrew origin signifying "fortification".

This has yet to be linguistically substantiated, but some scholars point out that the Hebrew word 'herev' meaning 'sword' is a noun derived from the verbal root 'harav' which means 'to attack' and thus could have kinship with the modern Khyber.<sup>2</sup> The historian Charles Allen writes, "The Pakhtuns say that when Allah created the world he had a pile of rocks left over, out of which he created Afghanistan some fifteen miles west of Peshawar, that pile of rocks is cut by a dark ravine out of which a river debouches onto the plain. This is the mouth of the Khyber Pass,

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1. C.G. Robertson, Kurram, Kabul & Kandahar: A Brief Record of Expression in three Campaigns under General

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Roberts (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 1979), 171.

2. Jules Stewart, *The Khyber Rifles From the British Raj to Al Qaeda* (Gloucestershire :Sutton Publishing Limited, 2005),39.

although pass suggests a high crossing point over a mountain range, whereas this is really a trail that leads up the bed of a river which has cut itself a deep, narrow defile of more than twenty miles through the mountains. Although only one of a number of fissures in the mountain chain which provides India with a natural defensive wall to west and north, the Khyber has always provided the subcontinent with its main invasion and trade route.”<sup>3</sup>

The Khyber Pass has witnessed the unfolding of historic events. Long before the first Persian carpet merchants dispatched their wares across the rocky desert tracks of Afghanistan, the Khyber served as an invasion route for the armies of Central Asian conquerors, from Alexander the Great to Babur, the first Mughal Emperor of India. Since the earliest days of trade in the region, the camel caravans from Persia, China and the bustling markets of Central Asia that traversed the Silk Road found their natural gateway to India through the Khyber. “Through the centuries these old hills have watched endless processions filing along their valleys, armies and traders, the pomp and panoply of war, and the peaceful caravan of the trader.”<sup>4</sup> Crocker observed on his travels in 1931, “Their rocky walls have witnessed the tramp of the legions and the weary feet of countless thousands of beasts of burden bearing the commerce of Bokhara, Afghanistan and Peshawar through the mountain passes.”<sup>5</sup> Paddy Docherty has described the significance of Khyber Pass, “The Khyber Pass marks more than just a border, more than a line on a map staffed by officials manning a barrier and browsing through passports.

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3. Charles Allen, *Soldier Sahibs* (London: John Murray, 2000), 37.
  4. Stewart, *The Khyber Rifles From the British Raj to Al Qaeda*, 34.
  5. Ibid

It is truly a frontier, an ancient zone of contested ground, long disputed and never entirely at peace, incorporated intermittently into empires and states but remaining unmastered by even the most powerful.”<sup>6</sup>

#### **The Strategic Importance of Khyber Pass for British India**

For roughly 150 years to the time of partition in 1947, British India’s borders remained impregnable to attack by sea. As for land incursions, the subcontinent’s eastern frontier was buffered by Burma, which proved itself an effective killing field for all invaders, including the Japanese Imperial Army during the Second World War. To the north, the Himalaya stood as a formidable deterrent to invasion, the logistical nightmare of an army marching across this frozen mountain wasteland at any time of the year, extremely difficult to open supply lines and communications. Only to the west was the empire vulnerable which was teeming with hostile tribesmen. The North-West Frontier was, in fact, the only corner of empire that the British never succeeded in pacifying.<sup>7</sup>

The Khyber Pass began to loom large in the thoughts of British India in 1838, the year in which the army scored a crushing, definitive defeat on the Sikhs. With the annexation of the Punjab, the government found itself at least on paper, lord and master of the wild North-West Frontier and the largely desolate uncharted Tribal Belt, 300 long and 100 miles across that lied wedged between the administered border and Durand Line. In their push to expand India’s borders, British administrators from Lord Auckland to Curzon came to view the Frontier as the vulnerable soft under belly of the Raj. Their dilemma was how to devise a strategy for pacifying these fierce tribesmen of high borderland. The British Government recognized the urgent need to fortify the North-West Frontier in order to safeguard the integrity of India’s most remote and volatile border, in particular the vital passes that could serve as invasion routes for Afghan as well as Russian armies. The North-West Frontier was by this time a key piece in Britain’s jigsaw of imperial strategy. By this time the government was forced to acknowledge that leaving the vast, uncharted tribal territory to its own devices as a buffer against Afghanistan and the advance of Russia,

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6. Paddy Docherty, *The Khyber Pass: A History of Empire and Invasion* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007),xxiii.
  7. Stewart, *The Khyber Rifles From the British to Al Qaeda*,41.

was no longer a tenable strategy.<sup>8</sup> The Viceroy Lord Lytton bemoaned the fact that the British officers who

ventured a mile or two into this no man's land were unlikely to be seen again alive. In 1878, thirty-six years after Britain's calamity on the retreat from Kabul the army once again crossed the Khyber, this time it was determined that the British soldiers would not be exposed to surprise attack on the road. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that whatever the sacrifices, the Khyber Pass was of vital strategic importance and needed to be garrisoned. In the late nineteenth century an idea began to take hold, inspired in part by the close call Major-General Sir Samuel Browne's column had in Pass at the outbreak of the Second Afghan War, when the army almost met with disaster in skirmishes with Afghan regulars. The army strategists realised it was not necessary to commit British troops to Khyber Pass after all, could not the job be done by trained and commissioned Afridi tribesmen who after all, loved nothing better than the chance to fire a rifle?<sup>9</sup> Thus the new Frontier Strategy was devised to employ local tribesmen to create safe buffer against Afghanistan and to secure trade route between Central Asia and British India.

### Formation of Khyber Rifles: Turning Poachers into Gamekeepers

The tribal Pakhtuns revealed themselves as a different sort of adversary from the native fighting forces the British had encountered east of the Indus.<sup>10</sup> These tribesmen of the hills were not easily bought off, much less converted to the cause of the Raj and they certainly were not to be subdued for long by force of arms. The British finally found the tribesmen's loyalty could in part be bought, in part commanded by officers of a very special calibre, men who spoke their language and understood their ways.<sup>11</sup> Ian Hay observed on his travels in the North-West Frontier Province in 1930, 'The British Government with its usual uncanny instinct for turning poachers into gamekeepers, has diverted them into the paths of usefulness by giving them a regular job, of which they are inordinately proud, and the rudiments of discipline.'

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8. Stewart, *The Khyber Rifles From the British Raj to Al Qaeda*, 12.

9. Ibid

10. Ibid, 12.

11. Ibid, 2.

They are only employed by day or the Khyber Pass closes, like Kensington Gardens at dusk.'<sup>12</sup> The Khyber Rifles was the original native levy raised by the British to guard the most critical gap on India's vulnerable and volatile North-West Frontier. Few will have heard of the Zib Militia, the Gilgit Scouts or the Kurram Militia. But the name 'Khyber Rifles' is another matter, and if it strikes a familiar chord, this is almost certainly because of the corps association with the historic pass they guarded. This oldest of Frontier Corps is to many a household name because the history of the pass is steeped in history and strife. The veteran Frontier man Lieutenant Colonel Henny Crocker once remarked that if the romance of the East is to be found in India, then surely the romance of India centres in the Khyber Pass.<sup>13</sup> The Khyber Rifles were originally thrust into the public eye by Talbot Mundy's gushing 1917 novel *King of the Khyber Rifles*. The most dripping prose: 'He was a jezailchi (musket carrying tribesmen) of the Khyber Rifles, hook nosed as an asprey, black-bearded, with white teeth glistening out of a gap in the darkness of his lower face.'<sup>14</sup>

In 1878, when war with Kabul was looking imminent, Colonel Robert Warburton, Political Officer Khyber took the initiative to open negotiations with those Afridi clans that had shown themselves willing to reach an understanding with the British. A deal was struck on 20<sup>th</sup> November, 1878, in return for a monthly allowance of 6,550 rupees, the tribal maliks agreed to allow their men to guard the Khyber Pass in each clan's respective limits and restrain their fellow tribesmen from 'molesting the high way.'<sup>15</sup> The following day, General Sir Samuel Browne, with a force of twelve infantry battalions, one brigade of cavalry, five batteries of field guns and four columns of Sappers, opened hostilities with Afghanistan by forcing the Khyber Pass in the first stage of the army's advance on Kabul. Soon after Browne's columns had crossed into Afghanistan, the native fighters were organised into a Corps of Jezailchis of about 250 men, partly Khyber Afridis and partly inhabitants of the Peshawar valley.

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12. Ibid, 49-50.

13. Ibid, 28.

14. Ibid, 29.

15. Ibid, 31.

They were very irregular, unshaven, unkempt, with no uniform but a red tag sewn on to the back of the pagri. <sup>16</sup> They were armed with the jezail, and were at first known as the Khyber Jezailchis.<sup>17</sup> Its duties were to assist in escorting convoys and repelling attacks on the pass. This marked the first time in recorded history that the pass had fallen under the control of a foreign military command which some of the world's most formidable fighting forces had failed to subdue over the centuries.<sup>18</sup>

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The wisdom of Warburton's initiative was never doubted, particularly in later years when the Khyber Rifles were obliged to bear the full impact of armed insurrection by their Afridi kinsmen. 'The Khyber Pass has to be kept open to us',<sup>19</sup> remarked General Sir William Lockhart, who led a punitive expedition into Tirah following the 1897 tribal insurrection. Lockhart acknowledged the pass to be the key trade route between the British India and Afghanistan. But the General argued with foresight, its commercial value was far outweighed by its strategic significance. 'The defile of the Khyber Pass should be guarded by irregular troops raised locally. It must be remembered that, in undertaking military operations in Afghanistan, the friendly attitude of the Frontier tribes would be of much greater moment than the absolute safety of any single pass however important. If the attitude were friendly, the pass would be secure in any case.'<sup>20</sup> Sir Olaf Caroe the last British Governor of the North-West Frontier province recounts that around the time the Khyber Rifles were raised in 1878, the government was in a state of panic over Russia's 1,000 mile push eastward across Central Asia. Something had to be done to secure India's border with Afghanistan, and for starters the obvious stop-gap measure was to send in more troops. But it was also necessary to ensure the loyalty of the Pakhtun tribes, whose sympathies lay more with Kabul than with the British.' A scheme was propounded

16. Charles Chenevix Trench, *The Frontier Scouts* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1986),7

17. Ibid

18. Stewart, *The Khyber Rifles From the British Raj to Al Qaeda*,32.

19. Ibid.

20. Ibid,32.

by Lytton with a view to giving the central government a more direct control over Frontier administration and policy, and improving the relations of the districts with their trans-border neighbors.<sup>21</sup> The Frontier, a relatively tiny tract of land in the vastness of the empire, was nevertheless Britain's imperial migraine. In September 1880, after the uneventful return to India of the Afghan expeditionary force, the army decided to pull its troops out of their remaining garrisons in Ali Masjid and Landi Kotal, if satisfactory arrangements could be made to keep the Pass open under the independent and exclusive charge of the tribes.<sup>22</sup>

The British government paid the cost of their maintenance, a sum amounting to 87,160 rupees per year,<sup>23</sup> whereas previously the native levies drew subsidies for items such as firearms. The levies were to be recruited and dismissed by the chiefs of the tribes concerned, who were solely responsible for their management, reporting these arrangements to the Political Officer at Jamrud. The first Commandant of the Khyber Rifles or the Jezailchis as they were still known in 1887, was Captain Gilbert Gasiford, a veteran of the Punjab Frontier Force. The situation radically altered when Sardar Muhammad Aslam Khan took command of the corps, which in 1887 was redesignated as the Khyber Rifles. The trusted corps became the only Pakhtun militia to be given powers to serve anywhere on the Frontier, not just in their Khyber home territory. The strength of the body at the time was about 550 men, with the usual complement of subadars, jemadars and subordinate officers. Only four years after the Jezailchis had come into existence, their loyalty to the British was put to the supreme test. The Zakka Khel clan of Afridis provided the Jezailchis in 1882 with a chance to cut their teeth in battle against their own kith and kin. In February 1882, Zakka Khel warriors swooped down on caravan coming up from Kabul as it lumbered towards its rest stop at Ali Masjid. No sooner had the marauders charged into the road, they were met by two companies of Jezailchis and a fusillade from their long-barrelled rifles that swiftly sent the raiders scurrying back to their mountain fastness before they could lay their hands on the booty-laden caravan.

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21. Olaf Caroe, *The Pathans* (London: Macmillan, 1958), 413.

22. Stewart, *The Khyber Rifles From The British Raj to Al Qaeda*, 79.

23. *Ibid.*, 83.

What stands out remarkable about this debut field operation of the future Khyber Rifles, was not only the fact that the Afridi recruits showed no hesitation in opening fire on their own tribesmen, but that their native officers had taken the decision to deploy Jezailchis of the very same Zakka Khel clan to do the job.<sup>24</sup> With this field operation the government was pleased to confirm that ‘The pass has since been protected by Jezailchis, and the arrangement made with the Khyber Afridis have been found to work satisfactorily, and long trains of travellers and pack animals, convoys of treasure, and stores of ammunition for Kabul have come and gone through the pass with safety.’<sup>25</sup> In 1888, the Khyber Rifles consisting of 350 volunteers took part in Black Mountain campaign. ‘His Honour (the Governor General) has no doubt that these men would prove very useful’, states the Hazara Field Force expedition plan.<sup>26</sup> The Khyber Rifles, in the ten years since the unit was raised, had won the government respect through the native troops spirited defence of the pass against marauders and insurgents of their own tribes. Now the Foreign Department was anxious to see as many of the Khyber Rifles as can be spared employed in accordance with their offer of service in the Black Mountain Expedition.<sup>27</sup> In the final days before putting the expeditionary force on the march, the government also decided that it was time to upgrade the Khyber Rifles to the status of a properly equipped corps.<sup>28</sup> The command to do so emanated from the exalted offices of Government House, where Lord Dufferin, impressed by what he had seen during his tour of the Khyber in the company of Roberts, heartily approved the request for breech-loading Sniders to be issued to the Khyber Rifles, in replacement of their antiquated muzzle-loading Jezails. Moreover, arrangements for issuance of Sniders and fifty rounds as well as one blanket per man were also made.<sup>29</sup> In accordance with the Viceroy’s instructions, the Khyber Rifles, who had borne the title for less than a year, stepped out of their rag-tag shalwar kameezes into regulation issue khaki tunics and gaitered plus fours, topped by the celebrated red-tagged pagari.

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24. *Ibid.*, 122.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, 125.

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*, 126.

The Khyber Rifles gained glory and distinction in its first Black Mountain Campaign fought alongside Indian and British Army regulars. Six men of the corps were awarded Indian Orders of Merit, the most outstanding recipient being Subadar Major Mirsal Akbar Khan, who was decorated for a number of extraordinary and reckless acts of bravery under fire.<sup>30</sup> Another Khyber Rifles Officer, Jemadar Muhammad Ghalli, received the Indian Order of Merit (IQM) for conspicuous acts of gallantry on five occasions.<sup>31</sup>

The Khyber Rifles due to its outstanding performance in the last campaign was again called out for Black Mountain Campaign in February, 1891. On 4 February, 300 men of the Khyber Rifles under Sir Aslam’s command, marched down from Jamrud Fort to Peshawar, to head towards the troubled region, once again accolades poured in from distinguished quarters, giving testimony to the gallantry and loyalty of the corps. ‘Your Khyber Rifles behaved admirably, and have won the respect and confidence of the General and all the troops.’<sup>32</sup> Colonel John Ommaney, Commissioner of the Peshawar Division, wrote to Warburton, ‘You may well feel proud of the good work done by you in the Khyber in managing the Afridis so as to have led to their volunteering and acquitting themselves so well.’<sup>33</sup> From the expeditionary force Commander-in-Chief himself, General McQueen, came this acclaim of the Khyber Rifles:

‘Their rapidity of movement over the hills and familiarity of the tactics pursued by the enemy have proved them to be troops of the very best material for the class of fighting in which we have recently been engaged. Their discipline has been excellent, and no instance of misconduct has been brought to my notice, or that of the column

Commanders under whom immediate orders they have served.<sup>34</sup>

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30. Ibid, 130.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid,131.

33. Ibid, 133.

34 .Hugh Lewis Nevill, *Campaigns on the North- West Frontier* (London: John Murray, 1912), 104.

The Pakhtun rising that swept across the Khyber and other parts in 1897 quickly developed into the greatest ever threat to British authority on the Frontier. The war drums had been sounding for weeks, as one by one the tribes began to rise up in arms against the government. First in Malakand, a campaign in which the young Winston Churchill got a taste of hand-to-hand combat with the tribesmen, and later in early August, when the revolt spread to Mohmand territory. The British Government held out the vain hope that Warburton's efforts to cement a relationship of trust with the Afridis would prevent the Khyber tribes from taking to the war path. During those summer days Khyber Rifles recruits manning the stone picquets in the pass gazed nervously at the swelling throngs of fellow Afridi and Orakzai tribesmen. The Khyber Rifles now numbered 825 men, under the command of Captain William Barton, a veteran of the last Afghan campaign had decried the entire North-West Frontier as 'the most lawless country on the face of the earth.'<sup>35</sup> The commander of Khyber Rifles sensing the impending assault, sent word to Peshawar requesting urgent reinforcements to be drawn from the nearly 12,000 British and Indian troops garrisoned in and around the city. However, he was told that not a man would be sent from Peshawar to reinforce the beleaguered garrison at Landi Kotal. The hordes of tribesmen overwhelmed Khyber Rifles and Landi Kotal and Jamrud fell in their hands in August, 1897. An official military memorandum gave reasons for not sending reinforcements to Khyber Rifles, "There was considerable reason to fear that rising of Khyber Afridis would be followed by a rising of Kohat Pass Afridis, and the Jawakis, and to have committed our only available troops to the Khyber would have left the Peshawar valley open to attack from the south and south-east."<sup>36</sup> A powerful dissenting voice came from Lockhart himself, who showed no sympathy for the official whitewash. 'However loyal and well- disciplined irregular native troops may be, they can hardly be expected to fight against overwhelming odds of their own kinsmen, after their British Commandant has been withdrawn, and they have been warned that no support or assistance is to be looked for under such trying conditions, the best mercenary troops in the world might be expected to waver, and I think it highly creditable to the Khyber Rifles that when left to their own resources, they fought as well as the ydid.'<sup>37</sup>

35. Stewart, *The Khyber Rifles From British Raj to Al Qaeda*, 141.

36. Ibid, 150.

37. Ibid, 152.

Although the Khyber Rifles were not officially disbanded after the fall of Landi Kotal, the corps was in a state of disarray, with the troops scattered throughout the Khyber villages. The Khyber Rifles were formally reestablished by March 1898 when Khyber Pass was back in the hands of British. Only one of the Khyber clans had flatly refused to accept Lockhart's terms of submission when tribal resurrection was put down in 1898 was Zakka Khels. This Afridi clan was real troublesome for the British. In 1907, the government decided to send punitive expedition against Zakka Khel in Bazar Valley. The Khyber Rifles played an instrumental role in the campaign. Roos-Keppel, the Commandant of Khyber Rifles acknowledged the services of the men of Khyber Rifles, 'This corps, which is composed mainly of Afridis, including some 350 Zakka Khel had to take part in an expedition against a people to whom the men were bound not only by race and religion, but by the closest ties of blood. Indeed in many cases during the expedition, brother was fighting against brother and son against father. The experiment was viewed with mistrust by many and with misgiving by all, but it has been more than justified, as throughout the expedition the Khyber Rifles gained universal praise for their keenness and willingness, not a man deserted and not a rifle was lost.'<sup>38</sup>

The First World War provided the detonator for a renewed outbreak of hostilities on the North- West Frontier. Turkey's entry into the European conflict on the side of Germany was the main cause for incitement to revolt. Tribal attacks on Frontier militia outposts were launched as early as November 1914 which eventually led to outbreak of third Anglo-Afghan War in May, 1919. In the beginning of the war the Khyber Rifles fought alongside the British troops, however by 10<sup>th</sup> May, the men of Khyber Rifles fell prey to the Afghan propaganda which was about the tales of heroic Pakhtun victories on Frontier.<sup>39</sup> The recruits of Khyber Rifles beginning to desert in large numbers which forced Roos- Keppel to remark, 'The Khyber Rifles have behaved very badly, and you can imagine how it distresses me to have to say this as I practically made them and am their Honorary Colonel.'<sup>40</sup> After the end of war Roos-Keppel wrote, 'The militia system grew up as a cheap expedient to relieve regular troops from irksome and arduous duties in a country where services is unpopular.

38. Ibid,166.

39. Ibid,177.

40. Ibid,177.

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The militia outposts were located far off in tribal areas, and miles of hostile and dangerous country separated them from the nearest posts of regular troops. In such circumstances, and particularly when there were no regular troops to support them during the Afghan war, the militia men could hardly have been expected to remain loyal to the British Government in the face of the cry of jihad in Afghanistan and of the aggravated anti-British feelings in tribal territory.<sup>41</sup> The first thirty-five years of this unique and original native levy of the North-West Frontier was brought to an inglorious end on 19 May, 1919.<sup>42</sup> The Khyber Rifles as a corps was disbanded not to be raised again until after Second World War. The reincarnated Khyber Rifles that emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War bore little resemblance to the corps that had been disbanded only a quarter century before. The post-1947 Khyber Rifles took up positions as the second line of defence in the Pass. In the event of invasion, they were to be deployed in support of the Pakistan Army much in the same way that the original Jezaichis had been engaged by the British as a stopgap force. In April 1948, four platoons of the Khyber Rifles under the command of Major Aziz Khan arrived in Kashmir. The experience of fighting under the command of Pakistan regulars in Kashmir not only enhanced the profile of Khyber Rifles, but prepared the corps for more sophisticated duties, well beyond its original role as guardians of the Khyber Pass.

41. Ibid, 177-178.

42. Ibid, 178.

## CONCLUSION

The British officialdom adopted a predictably pragmatic approach to the hardships of life in the Khyber. The Pakhtuns who gave the Indian Army its most biting headache were 'the Afridis, those lean but muscular men, with long, gaunt faces, careful shots and skirmishers, patiently awaiting the chance of an easy shot at the enemy.'<sup>43</sup> The Afridis comprised the largest and most belligerent of the Frontier tribes, and they came to make up the backbone of the Khyber Rifles, when on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1878, Warburton raised what was the embryo of the Khyber Rifles, the first native corps to be formed in the tribal territory. The tribesmen volunteered for service in the Khyber Pass because enlisting in the Khyber Rifles provided them not only with an income, but it also afforded them an opportunity to fire their rifles with impunity. In the last decade of nineteenth century it was the British policy to withdraw the British forces from advanced positions and concentrate these in British territory behind them as a safeguard and a support. Consequently all regular troops were withdrawn in Khyber from the advanced positions and replaced by two battalions of enlarged Khyber Rifles. The Khyber Rifles was the only militia which served outside Khyber with distinction. The services of the men of Khyber Rifles had been profusely lauded by the British officers. Thus the Khyber Rifles the pioneer of all other militias and scouts in Tribal Belt served the British Government as the native guardians of the celebrated Pass till the outbreak of third Anglo-Afghan War in 1919. The Pakhtun youth still continue to flock to the ranks of the legendary Khyber Rifles today as they did more than 142 years ago, when Robert Warburton conceived the idea of turning poachers into gamekeepers.

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43. Ibid, 76.