

## History of Chitral Campaign

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### ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the north-west frontier region Jammu and Kashmir State. The paper explains Chitral campaign which was conducted by the British Indian forces along with the active support of Jammu and Kashmir State forces. This paper is an attempt to explain the important role played by the Jammu and Kashmir state forces to bring the important area of Chitral which was of prime importance for both the government of India and the Jammu and Kashmir Government. This campaign was also very decisive for the security of the north-west frontier of the Jammu and Kashmir state. We will explore in the paper the achievement of the control of the important Area for both British Government and Jammu and Kashmir State Government.

After the end of Hunza Nagar Campaign, trouble started in Chitral. During the close of the 1892 year, the powerful ruler of chitral Aman-ul Mulk died and a scramble for Mehtarship started among his seventeen sons.<sup>1</sup> Afzul-ul-Mulk the second son who was at chitral at that time, immediately took control of all the arms and treasury of the fort. He after killing all his brothers in Chitral left for Yasin to fight Nizam-ul- Mulkh, his elder brother. Nizam-ul-Mulkh provided only little resistance and fled to Gilgit. Afzal-ul-Mulk returned to Chitral and declared himself the Mehtar of chitral after taking the local into his confidence. Afzal was given recognition as Mehtar of chitral by Kashmir Darbar only on the condition that he would follow the policy of his father. However, Afzul-ul-mulk could not remain on the throne for a long time. Sher Afzal, the uncle of Afzal who had been struggling with Aman-ul-mulk for the mehtarship of chitral and living a life in exile in Afghanistan, came with some followers and killed Afzul-ul-mulk in the fort to claim his mehtarship.<sup>2</sup> Sher Afzal having relations with Afghanistan could not be digested by the British Government as the mehtar of chitral. It was considered as a direct attack on the sovereignty of the state by the British and by the Kashmir Darbar. They did not recognise Sher Afzal and started encouraging Nizam-ul-mulk who was at Gilgit, for his claim at chitral. Nizam left for chitral and a force of 100 men of the Bodyguard and 50 of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion was sent to tackle the hostile tribes on the border that was collected by Sher Afzal to oppose Nizam. Nizam entered chitral without any difficulty and Sher Afzal once again fled to Afghanistan to create trouble later again.<sup>3</sup> Nizam was recognised as the mehtar by the British through Kashmir Darbar again on the term similar to his father.

In 1895, problem again occurred in chitral due to the murder of Nizam-ul-mulk on 1 January by his step brother Amir-ul-mulk.<sup>4</sup> The first attack to capture the throne was made by Umra Khan of Jandul by capturing Kita Drosh on the southern frontier of chitral and was preparing to attack chitral.

<sup>1</sup> Chitral and Kashmir relations from the beginning till 1895, GOI, Fgn, Sec-F, July 1895, Nos 946-998.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas H.C, *The Chitral Campaign*, 1895, p 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>4</sup> Chauhan Amar Singh, *The Gilgit Agency (1877-1935)*, New Delhi, p 134.

Sher Afzal also joined him. Due to the early moves of Umra Khan, Col. Bruce, the new British Agent at Gilgit moved Raghunath Battalion under Col. Jagat Singh to reinforce the chitral fort which was in danger. General Baj Singh also decided to accompany the Battalion to chitral. The garrison in chitral was placed under Capt. Cambell, comprised 5 British officers, 301 officer and men of Raghunath and 99 all ranks from 14<sup>th</sup> Sikh.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1895, at about 4:30 when Cambell heard the news of Sher Afzal's arrival, he ordered Capt. C.V.P. Townshend to challenge Sher Afzal with 200 men of the Raghunath Battalion. General Baj Singh who actually was not required accompanied the troops to help Capt. Townshend whenever required. Capt. Townshend sent Capt. Baird to accompany an advance section under Badri Nar Singh. Capt. Baird had taken his section on the high ground to the east and now he was operating away from the main body and Townshend had to reinforce him with 25 men under Subedar Shanu. Townshend left with 100 men, when he heard that Afzal was in a house some hundred metres from his position. He found that the house was vacant and saw some men were moving in a hamlet at about 450 mtrs ahead.<sup>5</sup> Townshend in search of Afzal continued his advance. He advanced very tactfully and reached about 183 mtrs from the Hamlet. Suddenly Townshend along with Raghunath men came under heavy fire. As there was no scope of advance, so he decided to hold his position. Also Capt. Baird who tried to move was fired upon from the Hamlet. It was nearly impossible to attack to launch an attack without a cover. Capt. Cambell himself got hit while trying to attack. Gen. Baj Singh when saw joined Col. Jagat Singh, Capt. Townshend and Maj. Bikram Singh but could not move more than 25 mtrs due to heavy fire. Gen. Baj Singh was struck by a bullet and killed while Maj. Bikram got injured. In this hopeless situation Townshend ordered to retreat to the fort who could be made possible with the safety with the help of 14 Sikhs. Capt. Baird also faced worst and reached fort only after being carried by the men.

In all it was a futile operation in which Raghunath had lost 23 men and 33 wounded. It was a failure of Cambell who

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p 150.

did not act handsomely by ordering a hurriedly attack so late in the evening and even without any cover against heavy enemy's fire. For Raghunath it was just a question of obeying the orders right or wrong and Gen. Baj Singh laid down his life in upholding good name of his troops in an impossible task.<sup>6</sup> After Campbell's injury the operation command of the fort was on Townshend. He demolished front wall and outhouses around the fort which restricted their view of outside, so that the enemy could not take the advantage of it. He built covered way of 32 mtrs towards water point on the bank of the river. Proper management of the ration was done. Capt., Townshend in his despatch at the end of siege wrote that, "when so many did so well, it is hard to distinguish the sepoy who never murmured to everything calmly the overwork, the half ration of atta, the over fatigue, practically getting no rest, they slept in .....their posts throughout the siege". The plan adopted by Townshend was also appreciated.

After being so alert, on 7<sup>th</sup> April the enemy managed to set large faggots and logs of wood in a pile against the corner of the gun tower on fire. The tower was soon on fire. The fire was finally put down by the men after so much hindrance of strong wind and heavy fire, with the help of mud and water. The enemy made some unsuccessful attempts to put it again. After remaining unsuccessful in burning the gun tower, the enemy now started to dig a tunnel. To cover the noise of the digging they began playing 'tom tom' and pathan pipe in the summer house every night. They kept on firing to distract the garrison. On 17<sup>th</sup> April, one sentry reported knocking noise. The sound was very clear and loud. There was no doubt that a mine was being attempted. There was hardly any time for countermining. The only way was to destroy it before its completion. Consequently Lt. Harley with 40 men, 60 men of Raghunath under Maj. Bhagwan Singh and Subedar Gandip Singh was ordered by Townshend to destroy the mine.

On 4<sup>th</sup> April, at 4 o'clock, a party rushed from the Garden Gate towards Summer House and took the pathan by surprise and captured Summer House with the loss of two men of Raghunath. The work of the demolition of the mine started immediately. The shaft of the mine was found outside the garden wall. Soon the mine was blown up and the party rushed back to the fort through the Garden Gate after completing the dangerous task. A total of 8 men had got killed and 13 wounded in this daring action. Sepoy Nikoo of the 4<sup>th</sup> Kashmir Rifles displayed conspicuous gallantry, being the first along with Naik Garja Singh of 14<sup>th</sup> Sikh to jump into the mine shaft. The first attempt was made by Lt. Edward to reinforce the chitral on 7<sup>th</sup> March when he started for chitral on with 40 men of Raghunath under Subedar Dharam Singh and 20 Bengal sappers and miners under Lt. Fowler. After three days, a treachery was done by the pathan and two British officers were arrested and Subedar Dharam Singh and his men were killed.<sup>7</sup>

The situation at chitral had become a serious affair. Lt. Col. J.G. Kelley was ordered to move towards chitral. He with 32 pioneers reached Gilgit from Chilas on 22 March. There he

was ordered by commander-in-chief India for taking military command at Gilgit Agency and also permitted him to take any necessary steps for the protection of Gilgit and chitral. On 23 March after having proper defence arrangement at Gilgit, he left for chitral with a force of 396 men of 32 pioneer and two guns of Kashmir Battery. The task of covering such distance (354 km) was done in two batches. The cases of frostbite were very high. The Gilgit forces had their first encounter on 9<sup>th</sup> April with enemy at Chakalwat. The second batch was behind but Col. Kelley had decided to attack with whatever the force of 280 men which included 40 men of Raghunath and two mountain guns of 1st Battery that had crossed in the first batch. The enemy was routed.<sup>8</sup>

The second encounter was on 13<sup>th</sup> April at NisaGol. The enemy here had erected Sangar on the zig zag road which went into Nallah.<sup>9</sup> There the enemy was also routed at the cost of three killings (N.K. Khojoo of Mountain Battery, Sepoy Mani Ram and Parbir Ghatti of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion) and five wounded. After NisaGol, there was no further fight with the enemy. But they had to face hardships in advancing forward. The Gilgit force reached chitral on 20 April after crossing breast high river water with a risk of being drawn away. When Afzal heard the news of the arrival of Col. Kelley at chitral, he had already fled away.<sup>10</sup>

#### Conclusion:

The chitral expedition came to an end. Shuja-ul-Mulk, the youngest legitimate son of Aman-ul-mulk was declared as the mehtar of chitral on the same terms as his father's time. To control the same situation in the future, two Battalions of Indian Infantry and a section of Mountain Battery were stationed at chitral. The greatest contribution for the successful of chitral Service State troops however had to pay a very heavy price for attaining this recognition. The State forces suffered as many as 72 killed which included 3 officers and 49 wounded.

#### References

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2. Chauhan Amar Singh, *The Gilgit Agency (1877-1935)*, New Delhi.
3. Thomas H.C, *The Chitral Campaign, 1895*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p 152

<sup>7</sup> Chauhan Amar Singh, *The Gilgit Agency (1877-1935)*, New Delhi, p 161-165.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.,