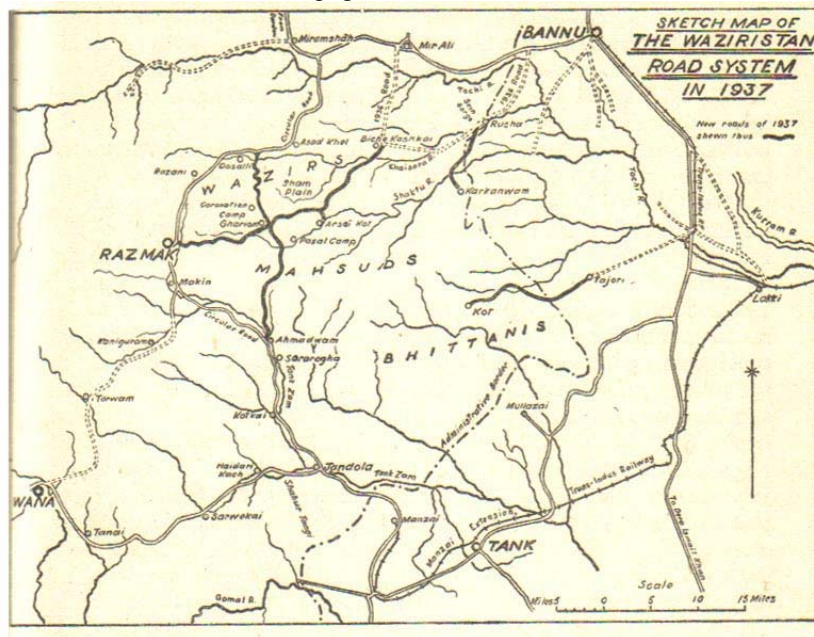


Extract from "Indian Sappers and Miners"
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The military and engineering operations in 1936 were but the prelude to further adventures in Northern Waziristan. The Faqir of Ipi intensified his propaganda against the Government, and in spite of political pressure and some bombing by our aeroplanes, the tribes under his influence continued to raid administered territory. The only remedy was to resume operations on a larger scale. To this end, the Bannu, Razmak and Wana Brigades were organized as a Division, known as "Wazdiv," although the Wana Brigade remained isolated since road communication with Wana had been interrupted. Wazdiv and the 1st Indian Division, which concentrated at Mir Ali at the end of April 1937, were then formed into a single command called "Wazirforce". The Faqir of Ipi was in the Lower Khaisora region; but as the hot weather approached he moved southwestwards, and establishing his headquarters in some caves at Aarsal Kot on the Shaktu *nallah* south of the Khaisora, continued to harangue his followers, distribute money and supplies, and send forth his emissaries to preach the gospel of hate.

The operations undertaken in the summer of 1937 took place in the area enclosed roughly by the old Circular Road, a rugged country in which water could be obtained only from the Tochi, Khaisora, Shaktu and Tank Zam streams and from a few springs. Fortunately, the services of no less than 6 Field Companies and a D.H.Q. Company of Sappers and Miners were immediately available. The 15th Company, Madras S. & M. (Captain E. H. T. Gayer, R.E.), which was due to return to Bangalore from Razmak, was detained in Waziristan, and with the 12th Company (Captain H. E. M. Newman, R.E.), which had arrived in relief, was flung at once into the battle. The 4th Company (Captain R. C. P. James, R.E.) and the 43rd D.H.Q. Company (Captain J. H. Blundell, R.E.), both of the Bengal S. & M., came from Rawalpindi with the 1st Division. The 2nd Company, Bengal S. & M. (Captain G. C. Clark, R.E.), was sent from Wana to join them, and in May the 3rd Company (Major W. F. Hasted, R.E.) and the 5th Company (Captain W. L. D. Veitch, R.E.) arrived from Roorkee. This imposing display of engineering talent was increased in July by the advent of the 14th Company, Madras S. & M. (Captain L. Wansbrough-Jones, R.E.), and the 19th Company, Bombay S. & M. (Captain A. R. S. Lucas, R.E.), from Wana, and in August by the addition of 4 Road Construction Battalions specially raised for the occasion. The Sapper units were called upon to perform most varied tasks. They repaired bridges and culverts, built blockhouses, supplied camps with water, and even erected ice factories to provide ice for armoured cars and tanks. Operating with columns on the march, they demolished towers, made tracks, and built piquet posts covered with wire screens as a protection against bombs. All this in addition to never-ending road making, the supervision of working parties, and the building of two large defensible posts for garrisons of the Waziristan Scouts. Their labours found a counterpart in those of the Military Engineer Services, and together the two branches catered successfully for the needs of Wazirforce.¹

¹ More Roads (Waziristan, 1937)," by Maj. A. E. Armstrong, M.C., R.E., appearing in *The R.E. Journal*, Vol. LIII, 1939. Pp. 1-16.

On May 12th, 1937, the Bannu and Razmak¹ Brigades of "Wazdiv" were concentrated at Dosalli near the Circular Road between Razani and Asad Khel, and after a night march of 6 miles southwards over a precipitous range, the Bannu Brigade established itself on May 12th in Coronation Camp on the stony Sham Plain. Successive bounds forward over easier country brought the troops to Ghariom and Pasa Camps, whence issued the column which, on May 28th, wrecked the Faqir of Ipi's lair at Aرسال Kot. The Faqir and his followers had decamped some days earlier, leaving behind them little but masses of literature and legions of fleas; but the 3rd and 12th Companies had the satisfaction of blowing in the Faqir's caves and completing the destruction already wrought in the village by the Royal Air Force. The 3rd Company was detailed to demolish the Faqir's personal cave and others to the south, while the 12th Company destroyed the few remaining buildings of Aرسال Kot and some caves to the north. Accompanied by Lieutenant A. F. M. Jack, R.E. (Field Engineer), Major W. F. Hasted, R.E. (O.C. 3rd Company), approached the mouth of the Faqir's cave. Smoke was pouring from it, so they threw in a bomb and waited for the smoke to clear. Then, with revolvers cocked and torches held well away from their bodies, they dashed through the entrance only to discover that the Faqir had fled. The 3rd Company placed 400 lbs. of guncotton in the largest of the four chambers composing the cave and smaller amounts in the other three, and the subsequent detonation of about 1,000 lbs. of explosive completely obliterated the place. Lieutenant R.C. Orgill, R.E., of the 3rd Company, blew in another cave with 400 lbs. of gunpowder, while the 12th Company demolished three more caves and flattened the remains of Aرسال Kot.

The destruction of his headquarters lowered the Faqir's prestige and ended the first phase of the operations. The firebrand of Ipi was temporarily a fugitive. The second phase, that of roadmaking, lasted without intermission until October 15th, 1937. There were occasional clashes with hostile gangs, but no organized resistance was encountered. On June 1st, the 1st Division relieved the Bannu and Razmak Brigades in the Sham Plain and the two brigades concentrated in the Razmak area.² Meanwhile, the Circular Road, which had been damaged between Dosalli and Razmak, had been re-opened by the combined efforts of the Sappers and Miners and the Military Engineer Services. The third and final phase of the operations took the form of an invasion of the Bhattani country further south by the 1st Division and more roadmaking by the Sappers and Miners and civilian labour in one of the most fantastically rugged regions on the North-West Frontier. This, briefly, was the general trend of events after the downfall of the notorious Faqir.



Waziristan tribal village demolition – 1937. from H.E.M. Newman's collection

From an engineering point of view, the second phase, that from the end of May to the middle of October, 1937, may be regarded as the most interesting, for it involved the greater part of the construction of 115 miles of motor road at a cost of £232,500. The scheme was to open up the country by a north-and-south road from Dosalli to Ahmadwam, near Sorarogha, and an east-and-west road from Razmak to Biche Kashkai on the Khaisora looproad built in 1936. These highways would cross at Ghariom. Work was started from Dosalli by the 1st Division on June 7th, and from Ahnladwam by contract labour three weeks later, and on July 10th the 12th Company Madras S. & M., turned the first stone on the Razmak-Ghariom section undertaken by "Wazdiv." The 4th Company, Bengal S. & M., and the 14th Company, Madras S. & M., also worked on this section. On November 20th, the Army Commander was able to motor from Ahmadwam through Ghariom to Razmak and "Wazdiv's" immediate task was finished. Meanwhile, the eastern branch from Ghariom to Biche Kashkai, some 21 miles in length, was receiving attention. The 3rd Company and a Road Construction Battalion started work from Ghariom on August 14th, and a fortnight later, work was begun further ahead by contract labour. All the new roads in Northern Waziristan were run, so far as possible, along watersheds instead of up valleys, a procedure which, apart from tactical advantages, reduced cross-water drainage. Water was pumped to the camps along the Ghariom-Biche Kashkai section by a 4-in. Victaulic pipe-line, 12,000 yards in length.³ This section was completed by November 17th, when the main "Sapper" part of the operations ended. Roadmaking, nevertheless, continued in Waziristan,

¹ Pencilled note by H.E.M. Newman: "RAZCOL was besieged in Razmak till June so could not have been in Dosalli."

² Pencilled note by H.E.M. Newman: "Razcol was never in the Sham area."

³ Annual Records, K.G.V.'s O. Bengal S. & M., 1937-38, p.28.

and in some of these projects a few Sappers were concerned. A 20-mile stretch of motor road from Tajori in administered territory to Kot in the Bhattani country was completed by December 2nd, 1937, a short length was built to Arsal Kot, and a branch from the Khaisora loop-road of 1936 was laid by a Road Construction Battalion from Rucha to Karkanwam. Early in November, some of the Sappers and Miners were detailed to assist in the construction of two semi-permanent posts for the Waziristan Scouts, one at Ghariom and the other at Biche Kashkai. They supplied the skilled labour, and the Road Construction Battalions and infantry furnished the working parties. Each post was designed for 12 platoons of Scouts and held a 3-days' reserve of supplies for a brigade. Each had 1,200 yards of perimeter wall, 6 ft. high, with two belts of barbed wire outside. Within were water-tanks to hold a total of 48,000 gallons, and also barracks and other buildings for the garrison.¹ No risk could be taken of a shortage of water, for water-supply had proved to be the chief problem throughout the campaign.

The situation in the Wana area was becoming tense even before the operations against the Faqir of Ipi were started in the Sham Plain, and since the end of February, 1937, it had been necessary to run convoys from Manzai under escort by armoured cars because the road could not be piqueted adequately. Early in April, a number of Wazirs from the north were seen watching a motor convoy on its way through the 3-miles' length of the Shahur Tangi. Suspicions were aroused, and they were soon shown to be fully justified for a convoy was ambushed in the *tangi* on April 9th and seven British officers lost their lives. Among these was Lieutenant E. C. L. Hinde, R.E., who was on his way to rejoin the 19th Company, Bombay S. & M., at Wana. It appears that as the head of the convoy reached a point well inside the narrowest part of the deep gorge it was met by a long string of camels led by unarmed men. The first three lorries got past the camels. Then, on a pre-arranged signal, the cameldrivers drove their camels into the middle of the road, leapt behind some rocks to retrieve their hidden rifles, and opened fire at point-blank range, concentrating on the British officers, lorry-drivers and machine-gun crews. Those who survived, including a leave party of Sappers from the 19th Company, took up positions behind rocks, and with the assistance of an armoured car, defended themselves until help arrived at dusk.² The ambush was remarkable because the Shahur Tangi had a bad name with the Mahsuds, if not with the Wazirs. Until 1921 it had never seen a like incident, for the Mahsuds believed that any fighting in it would mark the end of their independence and they were furious with the Wazirs for entering it in 1937 to lay an ambush.

After the Shahur Tangi incident, all roads into Razmak were closed until the end of May, and the only mode of travel was by aeroplane. The Razmak pipe-line was destroyed for a considerable length, and the garrison had to rely on water from a tube-well outside the perimeter.³ The incident, coupled with the transfer of the Waziristan Scouts to the north, resulted also in a gradual cessation of all supplies to Wana and consequently a stoppage of all work on the New Wana Project on which the 9th and 14th Companies, Madras S. & M. (Captains L. A. B. Patters and Lt. Wansbrough-Jones, R.E.), and the 6th and 8th A.T. Companies, Bengal S. & M. (Captains G. D. Mc. K. Sutherland and Hon. R. L. Napier, R.E.), were engaged. The 14th Company moved to Razmak in July, and the units left in Wana turned their attention to building piquet posts, strengthening defences and supplying detachments to accompany small columns. There was little fighting and not much excitement until, in October, a visit by the Commander-in-Chief entailed the re-opening of the road to Razmak, for part of which the Wana Brigade was responsible. The 8th A.T. Company then went out to build *sangars* to guard the road, and the Commander-in-Chief was escorted safely into Wana. During his visit he decided that the camp and its garrison should be expanded still more and that greater attention should be paid to protecting the buildings from sniping than giving them southerly aspects. As the Garrison Engineer was on leave, this decision threw the burden of much re-designing on the Sapper and Miner officers; but they did their best to meet the emergency, and when materials began to arrive once more from Manzai, the Wana Project took a new lease of life. No serious interruptions followed, although for a time there were occasional skirmishes with small *lashkars*. Then peace returned to Waziristan, and the garrisons of Wana and Razmak resumed their normal life.

¹ A plan of the Biche Kashkai Post is given in "Field Engineering (India)," appearing in *The R.E. Journal*, Vol. LIII, 1939, pp. 542-546.

² Obituary Notice of Lieut. E. C. L. Hinde, RE., appearing in *The R.E. Journal Supplement*, June, 1937, p. 189.

³ Annual Records, *Q.V.O. Madras S. & M.*, 1937-38, pp. 42, 43.