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## Waziristan 1937 to 1939

### 12 FIELD COMPANY QVO MADRAS SAPPERS AND MINERS

#### LIEUT COLONEL H E M NEWMAN



*The Author was commissioned in 1919 and joined 3 YO Course at the SME. In mid 1922 he was posted to 54 Fd Coy then part of 3 Div. Between 1924-29 he served in India with the Madras S&M, spending 2 Years in Waziristan with 9 Fd Coy. 1929-35 saw him back in UK with CRE Welsh Area and Ord Svy based on both Edinburgh and Southampton. He returned to India in 1936 first to the Madras S&M and Waziristan again before joining a skeleton Bde staff as CRE in Burma posed with the task of assisting the Sixth Chinese Army to move from Yunan via Kengtung through Taungyi where he was based. He escaped from this area on foot by the refugee route to Assam. He contracted malaria and was medically boarded back to Bangalore. Between 1944 and 1949, when he retired from the Active List. he was successively AD Svy Southern Command, AD Svy 21 Army Gp BAOR and AD Publications Ord Svy. A self styled Madrasophile he hated the 5-year rule which prevented continuous service with the Sappers and Miners.*

THERE was a gap spanning about a decade before World War II in the Historical Records of the QVO Madras S&M due to preoccupation during that War with the unprecedented expansion. The account which follows derives from the compilation which I was asked to prepare to help fill it. Luckily my wife had kept my correspondence covering this period, because without it I should have been helpless. Also luckily many details were supplied by the late Lieut. Colonel J B (Birdie) Sutherland DSO, OBE and by Colonel A M (Arthur) Field OBE, MC, particularly for the three months of 1938 when I was on privilege leave in the UK.

To assist the reader I list a glossary of words which may be unfamiliar to younger readers. Their first use in the text is in *italic*.

*algad*: a dry or nearly dry watercourse

*badmash*: enemy

*band*: wall

*baniah*: see footnote 2

*bhisti*: water carrier

*bhusa*: chopped straw

*kajawahs*: two per camel, not unlike stretchers

*karez*: artificial channel watering terraced fields

*khad*: scree

*khassadars*: locals paid by the Political Agent (PA) to keep order in their area

*lashkar*: a tribal gathering bent on aggression

*malik*: Head man

*manza*: a plateau

*nallah*: any valley, deep or shallow

*narai*: a mountain pass

*paggri*: turban

*pakhal*: felt covered rectangular metal tank to hang from a pack saddle containing six or seven gallons

*tangi*: where a watercourse narrows to a gorge

*raghza* or *rogha*: nearly level ground dropping abruptly to a watercourse.

To further assist I list the pronunciation of vowels in names etc:

"ā" as the "a" in past

"e" as the "e" in pet

"a" as the "u" in punt

"i" as the "ea" in peat

"ai" as the "i" in pint

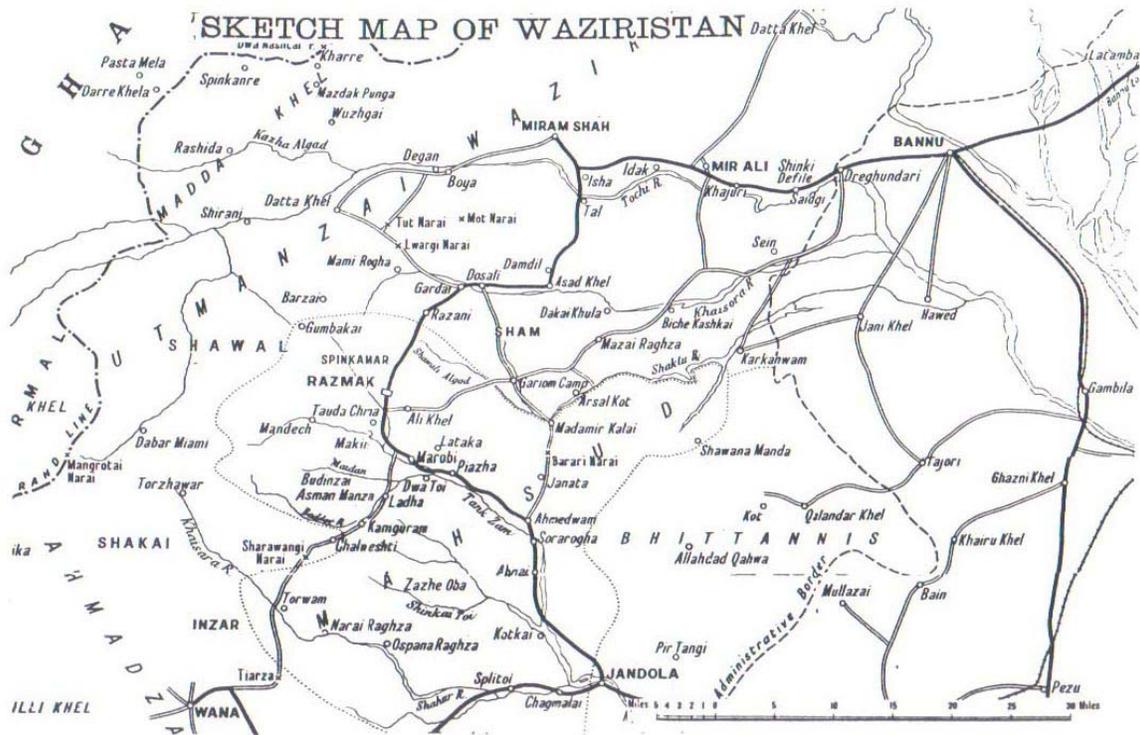
"ō" as the "o" in post

"ē" as the "a" in pate

"o" as the "o" in pot

"u" as the "oo" in Poona (now spelt "Pune")

In my limited experience the vowel "a" in romanised Indian place names was seldom in assonance with the "a" in "pat". Calcutta, Bangalore and Travancore were among the exceptions perhaps due to English mispronunciation.



12 Field Company (Fd Coy) detrained at Bannu on 8 March 1937, some four days after leaving Bangalore, for a two year routine stint in Waziristan. I was in command and with me were Lieutenants J.A.G. (James) O'Ferrall and M.A. (Michael) Biddulph. Birdie Sutherland was earmarked to join us on his return from leave to replace one subaltern, and Arthur Field was already in Razmak with our advance party relieving 15 Fd Coy, who were due back at Corps HQ in Bangalore; but weeks for us and months for them would elapse before either Coy reached its destination.

It had so happened that in the autumn of 1936 the parents of a Hindu girl had brought an action against a local Muslim for abducting their daughter, both parties thereby exacerbating the ever-latent communal discord. The case dragged on and became a grist to the dissident mill of the Faqir of Ipi (Ipi being a village near Mir Ali). He seized the opportunity to rouse the Daur Wazirs and other Wazir hotheads, and threatened to march on Bannu to prevent the return of the girl after the tribal elders had at last agreed to surrender her.

Bannu's small cantonment was bounded by its perimeter barbed wire fence. Its principal occupants were the Bannu Brigade, which, on operations, was referred to as the Tōchi Column (or Tōcol) named from the nearby Tōchi River. Included in it were quarters for wives and families, but none of these might proceed any further westward.

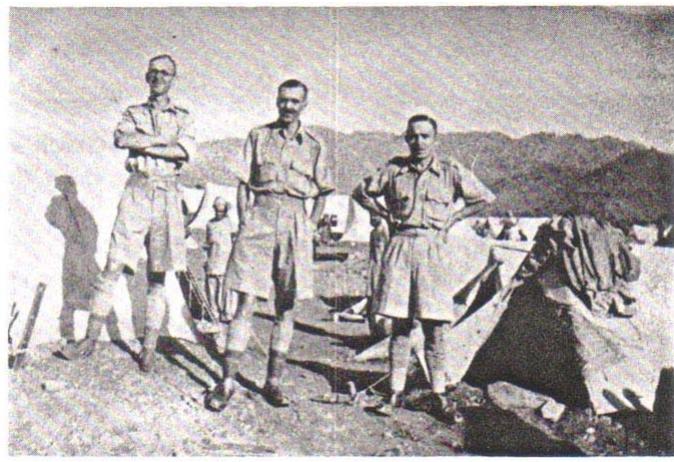


Photo 1. Michael Biddulph. Author, James O'Ferrall in Dosali Camp shortly before the night advance on May 9/10 to Coronation Camp

12 Coy was quartered in the Bannu Rest Camp while units of 1 Division (1 Div) passed through to Mir Ali, whence in a few weeks they were to advance into the Khaisora area to the south to engage Ipi's *lashkar*. Unfortunately, as so often happened, the enemy slipped away retreating to the remote village of Arsal Kot in the Shaktu valley. These operations, and the generally dangerous conditions, drastically reduced the convoys between Bannu and Razmak, and soon damage to the road was to stop them altogether.

We in 12 Coy, stranded and impatient to move, began partial mobilization. The peace establishment and pay-and-mess-book accounts were not affected, but equipment ledgers were closed, rations and fodder were issued on the active service day-to-day principle and eventually, after much importunity, the mules and equipment which had been handed over to 15 Coy's advance party back in Bangalore were restored. Locally, and elsewhere with sections detached, we were occupied on trivial minor works and on reconnaissances under escort for forward planning. Eventually, when the repairs to the abutments to a bridge in the Shinki *Tangi* had barely begun, orders came on 2 May to move next day to Saidgi en route for Dosali. There on 5 May we joined Tocol under the command of Brigadier Maynard. Tocol with 1 Div and the Razmak Brigade (Razcol) together formed a single Wazirforce, and we were about to play our part in a bold and unusual frontier operation.

Dosali camp (Photo 1) lay some fifteen to twenty miles short of Razmak on the Waziristan circular road. It was close to a fortress-like permanent post on the northern bank of the Khaisora River which was manned by a detachment of the Tōchi Scouts. The Scouts were lightly armed militia, led by infantry officers seconded for the purpose, and they recruited Pathān tribesmen from alien regions to obviate blood feuds, and worked under the control of the Political Service to maintain law and order.

Armed reconnaissance, false rumours, and in fact all possible ruses had been used to persuade the enemy that our destination was Razmak, and even the units taking part were only told the true objective at about 1830hrs on 11 May. It was no less than an advance that very night on to the Sham Plain six miles south as the crow flies, but ten or eleven by the route to be taken. This was not by the Dosali *Algad* skirting the village of that name, but climbing up and along the knife-edged Iblanke Ridge which rises some 900ft above the river bed. To have been caught up here by any tribesmen from the adjacent parallel ridges to either side could have been disastrous, and by now particularly dangerous since the Faqir was reported to have assembled a large retinue by dispensing magic charms against wounds and death and by promises of loot to volunteers from beyond the Afghan frontier.

Tocol set out in strict silence at 2100hrs leaving units of 1 Div in Dosali Camp to maintain it and later to develop the L of C (Lines of Communication). Tōchi Scouts led the way and soon we were wading the river and the climb began. The narrow ridge enforced a single file formation so that most of us spent more time at the halt than moving, but everyone kept closed up to prevent losing direction in the pitch darkness. The inevitable noise and confusion became terrifying. Boots clattered on rocks. Dislodged boulders tumbled down the *khad*. Pack mules lost their foothold and fell headlong scattering their loads, and their drivers followed as best they might to retrieve them. Not a few animals had to be destroyed. As dawn broke the column was still strung out along the ridge and rifle fire broke out ahead, soon to be followed by the crump of 4.5 howitzer shells from the mountain gunners; but the enemy had been deceived and the comparatively light resistance was quickly overcome. Nevertheless we did not reach our destination till around 1300hrs by when the camp piquets had been established on the hills around. It was named Coronation Camp because on this day, 12 May, King George VI was crowned.

Our necessary supplies were dropped by parachute, but the water situation nearly spelled disaster. We were told to establish the brigade water point in an adjoining *nallah* running from east to west and we were forbidden to move beyond the right turn north where the *nallah* extended beyond piquet protection. However and wherever we scratched the flow was insufficient. At last someone broke bounds and water in greater abundance was discovered beyond the bend, but by the time the brigade major was so informed and the piquet line extended it was dark before the last *pakhal* was filled, and the last mule watered.

The algad track was fit for light tanks and animal transport by the 17th and on that day three battalions of 1 Div and 3 Fd Coy (Bengal Sappers) under Brevet Major Hasted, arrived in camp. MT could not make it for another week. These reinforcements were to hold Coronation Camp while Tocol, with 3 Coy and 12 Coy, (less one section to maintain the camp water supply), advanced to Gariōm on the 18th, five miles to the south, encountering resistance all the way.

Gariōm lay at the far end of the plain at the confluence of the Shām *Algad* and a sizable tributary from the west. On 20 May a storm broke cascading hail stones up to 3/4in in diameter. Several sepoy caught in the open without their *paggris* fell stunned, and a thousand maddened animals ripping their tethers from the ground stampeded over and through the perimeter. Hail turned to heavy rain with

thunder, and when this stopped devastation reigned. The algads were hurtling torrents full of debris a hundred yards, instead of a yard or two, wide. Tent holes were awash covering bedding, equipment and arms. Cooking pots, saddlery and ration bags lay under hailstones inches deep. The surrounding hills were alive with mules and horses. Luckily for us the freak storm had cowed the enemy during Tōcol's embarrassment. The animals returned to camp for their evening fodder and during the next day order was restored.

At 0100hrs on the 28th the column, less a maintenance party for Gariōm, made for Pasal Camp just short of the Shaktu River and one and a half miles from Aarsal Kōt, encountering opposition only after daybreak. Next morning it was on to Aarsal Kōt itself to find it evacuated. Rumours of vast caves able to hold 250 men and horses proved false; only four or five small caves were found, heavily infested with fleas, and none more than twenty feet deep, so that a mere fraction of the explosives carried were used to destroy them. 3 Coy dealt with the southerly caves including the one supposed to have been Ipi's, while we destroyed those to the north, and also flattened everything in the village left standing after the RAF bombings.

After having restored communications with Razmak, 1 Div relieved Tōcol on the Shām Plain on 1 Jun, and we, with Tōcol, marched South peacefully, apart from a little sniping one night, to join the Takki, or Tānk. Zām near *Sorarōgha* on 7 Jun. Ipi had tried to embroil the Mahsuds whose country this was, but he had lost face and the local māliks sensing possible contracts to build roads, kept a tight hold on their hotheads.

On 11 Jun Tōcol reached Tauda China, one day's march from Razmak, whence two 60pdr guns arrived by escorted MT to meet us. Next morning these were trained on Makin. After a couple of hours the Mahsud inhabitants, thus threatened, yielded up a notable *badmāsh* upon whose extradition the PA (Political Agent) had insisted. At long last 12 Coy reached its destination, by the back door so to speak.

Razmak derived its name from being situated between Razāni (Wazirs) and Makin (Mahsuds) and had been established in 1923 to keep the peace between these warring tribes. It was a permanent perimeter encampment 6,800 feet above sea level on a 1 in 50 sloping plain, the mountains lying reasonably well back. The barrack blocks built of local stone contained the Brigade HO; six infantry battalions (one of them British), leaving two to hold the camp when four were operating; a Mountain Artillery Regiment HO with two batteries of 4.5in howitzers; and amongst numerous ancillary services, a Military Dairy Farm where buffaloes were fed on *bhusa*, some imported green fodder and concentrates. Amenities included hockey and basketball pitches, squash rackets, a bazaar, a cinema showing Indian and British films alternately, communal facilities for various Christian denominations, and buildings within unit lines for gurdwaras (Sikhs), mosques (Muslims) and temples (Hindus) to suit the interchanging units who served in the District for two years.

During the rest of June, while 15 Coy was employed in Razāni, 12 Coy worked in Razmak about the camp, and, restricted to short periods on "road-open" days, in repairing a short concrete slab bridge towards Razmak *Narai* which had been destroyed by the enemy.

On 10 July we were deployed for work on the new roads, being joined at the end of the month by 15 Coy (Captain E H T 'Lawney' Gayer) and by 14 Coy (Captain L. Wansborough Jones) from Wāna. There were to be two new roads, one roughly east by north from Razmak to Biche Kashkai (south of Mir Ali to which a road already existed), and the second south from Dosali to Ahmedwām (north of Sorarōgha). The two roads crossed at Gariōm where a new permanent Scouts' post was also planned. In this manner the previously remote Shaktu Valley was to be made easily accessible. The roads would be unmetalled, fit for MT, and wheresoever possible would run along watersheds (even up and over the Iblanke Ridge) to be tactically safer than in valleys and to reduce the need for cross drainage. The CRE Wazirforce (Lieut. Colonel Cyril Martin VC) and his Field Engineers decreed the general alignment, leaving the Sapper companies to peg it out in detail, to supervise infantry working parties where the going was clay or gravel, and themselves to work on the rocky sections. The Madras companies worked from Razmak. The other roads were all dealt with either by the units of 1 Div, or by local Pathān contractors.

For many weeks Razcol and Tōcol, each with a detached section from 12 Coy, alternated in garrisoning Asman *Manza* which overlooked the Mahsuds' principal town and arsenal Kāniguram. The camp was practically unsnipable, and the threat enabled the PA to maintain the good behaviour of the influential māliks.

From mid-August to the beginning of December a fervent Madras Sapper, Major G R (Mike) Gilpin, supervised the three Madras companies as local CRE.

On 8 Sep at 0915hrs 12 Coy was ordered to stop work and make for camp, and in two hours time, armed with enough explosives to demolish twelve watch-towers, was on the march to Tauda China.

Next day we proceeded to Asman Manza with Tōcol, leaving Razcol with 14 Coy at Ladha. The objective was to punish Sher Ali, a local chieftain, who had been burning *khassadar* posts. Accordingly, on the 12th, Tōcol advanced west up the Baddar Valley on light scale, i.e. without tents and with two days' supplies. Sher Ali had fled, but the māliks, swearing loyalty on the Korān, led us to seven scattered shacks, no towers, which they declared to be the total of his properties thereabouts. The PA acceded to this improbable yarn and ordered them to be destroyed. They were so ramshackle that, razing them manually, some timbers fell unexpectedly and inflicted on us our only casualties for that year. One Sapper suffered a broken leg and Jemadar Ayyana a sprained back. They accompanied us back to Asman Manza on the 14th in camel *kajāwahs* thence to Razmak hospital by motor ambulance. Razcol arrived on the 17th to garrison the camp to enable Tōcol, again on light scale, to march next day to Torwām, a village on the Khaisāra (c.f. Khaisora) River towards Wāna. It was a peaceful operation with just one tower, one dwelling house and two shacks for destruction. We returned to Asman Manza on the 20th.

Having left a section with Razcol in Asman Manza we set out with Tōcol back on the 24th staging at Ladha for one night. Ladha to Razmak is 15 miles and Tōcol, without piqueting help from Razmak, was stretched for troops, so that we were ordered to man the three or four camp piquets before dawn till the final withdrawal of the rearguard. The Sappers were delighted with their unusual role, but we lacked the infantry's automatic weapons, signals equipment, and recognition screens, their training and practice. I kept my fingers crossed.

Birdie Sutherland joined us in October as planned and we said goodbye to James O'Farrell who left us in November. We worked then mostly from Ali Khēl, a sniper-prone camp beyond the Engamāl Narai. When khassadars were one night suspected of having contributed to the sniping, their next issues of ammunition included tracer and with this they incriminated themselves.

Eventually the C-in-C was driven ceremoniously over all the new roads on 29 Nov, and next month peacetime procedures were resumed.

In spite of rumours of enemy groups and movements, 1938 opened quietly. Conditions in 1937 having precluded any individual training, the opportunity was seized to organise crash courses in education, and in military subjects to qualify NCO's and some promising Sappers for promotion; also, moreover, workshop courses for some 5th rate tradesmen to improve their rates of pay, and to the sending of higher rated men to Bangalore workshops for the same purpose. An apathetic trend amongst all ranks was transformed into one of enthusiasm which persisted throughout all our subsequent activities.

Arthur Field had been detached with a section of 3 Bde in Mir Ali since December 1937 spending much of the winter on camp improvements. He reported one day in early April that they were being kept in constant readiness to deal with mines. The menace began relatively harmlessly with spent cartridges charged with explosives and a detonator, became more serious when cylinders about 3in x 1in were introduced, and still more so when old cigarette tins included a charge of pebbles and nails to simulate shrapnel. Many were buried just below ground surface in the berms of roads on which infantry in single file were wont to move in operations. When scattered on or near rough tracks they were hard to detect. Often dung was scattered over loose earth for camouflage. During the months this phase lasted a few Sappers always preceded the vanguard on operations to seek out and destroy the mines. On one occasion Michael Biddulph fell victim and was hors de combat for two months. On another Birdie Sutherland was constrained to shoot a mule which had lost a hoof. Arthur was also called upon to booby-trap the stay wires of some telephone poles in Shinki Tangi using guncotton slabs in order to prevent Ipi's men from interfering with the Bannu-Razmak communications.

It was late May, when I was on three months privilege leave ex-India, that 12 Coy resumed operations, and these were in general less protracted and often perhaps more perilous than the 1937 series. In the first an enemy lashkar had assembled near Lwargi Narai, two days march from Razmak and midway between Razāni and Datta Khēl. Razcol joined 3 Bde from Damdil at Razāni on 31 May under Wazstrike (Waziristān District Tactical HQ) which was by then stationed usually in Razmak. On 2 Jun they advanced NW against strong opposition to Māmi Rōgha preceded by Birdie, now acting OC, with an escort of light tanks to reconnoitre the water supply. On the 5th, 12 Coy repaired some damaged bridges and retaining walls forward from Māmi Rōgha while the column advanced to Lwargi only to find that the reservoir there, which had taken a month to fill, had already been destroyed. 3 Bde with Arthur's section pushed forward from Lwargi to enable the mechanised column to relieve Datta Khēl which had been under siege by a lashkar armed with light "field guns". The force returned to Māmi Rōgha whence 3 Bde with Arthur's section were again sent forward to Lwargi to replace the khassadar's post there, which had proved ineffective, by a temporary post for a garrison of Tōchi Scouts. This consisted of an eight foot high perimeter wall surrounded by sandbags and it took a week to build with the reluctant help of infantry and gunner working parties. Tōchi Scouts occupied it on 14

Jun and all that night Māmi Rōgha was heavily sniped and several small calibre shells landed in the camp but failed to explode.

Next day the channel bringing water to the camp was sabotaged in a valley to the north, so that on 16 Jun 3 Bde mounted an operation to mend it and disperse the lashkar responsible. The advance guard with a Sapper reconnaissance party, who cleared rocks from the water channel, met stubborn resistance at once which intensified at Sarkai village two miles away. Beyond it the advance was assisted by the RAF bombing the surrounding hills, and the Sappers were able to reach the point where the channel had been breached, repairing it with sandbags and a stone band the while under constant sniping. 12506 Spr<sup>1</sup> displayed such high spirits and devotion to duty under fire, giving inspiration and confidence to his comrades, that he received an immediate award for his conduct. The following day 3 Bde was relieved by Razcol and returned to Razani and Razcol returned to Razmak shortly afterwards.

On 10 Jul Razcol again met 3 Bde at Mami Rogha to mount a second operation under Wazstrike. The objective was Kharre near the Afghān border where Ipi's HQ was reported to be occupying some caves. On 11 Jul the column moved to Dēgan in the Tōchi Valley. Next day Birdie with a Major from Wazstrike reconnoitred in light tanks the road to, and the water supply prospects at, Wuzghai where the force was due on the 13th. The actual measurement of the water flow was performed under sniper fire. During the advance the Sappers cleared mines from the road without casualties, but several undetected mines damaged men and mules of other units. On the final stretch up a nallah, where a track for MT was required, snipers killed one Sapper mule and hit the British NCO's motor cycle. (One British Warrant Officer and one Sergeant accompanied every outstation Coy to supervise workshop training and the company equipment.) At Wuzghai Camp beyond the Tōchi, Birdie was walking to an orders group with the CO of the Green Howards and his Adjutant when the latter was killed by a sniper, and the waterpoint there was constantly under fire. The Sappers were unscathed but there were casualties to men and mules, and one Indian infantry British Officer was killed. On the morrow the column overcame strong opposition to climb the 4,000 feet to the Bazuma Narai, itself 7,000 feet above sea level. The landscape beyond was so formidably steep, broken and heavily wooded that the Kharre objective was abandoned and the exhausted column bedded down where it was without even the possibility of a perimeter defence. Fortunately the enemy was too busy recovering his casualties to interfere with the vulnerable troops. On the return march three towers at Wuzghai were blown. The charge in one of them failed to detonate, whereupon, covered by the Sapper demolition party, the rearguard having halted on the Tōchi side of the village, Birdie returned alone and entered the tower to investigate. All three demolitions had been provided with parallel trains of fuse in case one failed. He found the primer in the first train had detonated without igniting the instantaneous fuse, but that the primer's detonation had severed the time fuse of the second train on the far side of the cellar. He cut and relit this second fuse and just escaped to a ditch as the tower disintegrated. The stony nallah back from Wuzghai again inflicted casualties from mines because the rough terrain made it almost impossible to locate them. The two brigades dispersed back to their original locations on 18 Jul.

On that day Arthur Field handed over to the newly joined subaltern P.A. (Pat) Adams, who was a novice to the frontier. Arthur left for home leave from which he did not return. Birdie was therefore required to accompany the 3 Bde Sapper section for the third of these operations on an expedition to the lower Khaisora with the brigade so as to enable the Scouts to search the village of Zerpasai. It began with a difficult night march and the village was duly surrounded by dawn. The quarry had decamped. The PA chose a tower in another village for demolition.

12 Coy was honoured by the following awards for outstanding conduct during these operations:

Captain Sutherland	DSO
Lieutenant Field	MC
Jemadar Kondayya	IOM (2nd class)
13710 Naik (Corporal)	IDSM
12506 Sapper	IDSM <sup>1</sup>

Regrettably I have no copies of the citations. The exploits of the two British Officers and of 12506 Spr have perhaps been sufficiently indicated, and I recall that the two others were decorated for notable courage and efficiency in mine detection.

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<sup>1</sup> The VCOs (Viceroy's Commissioned Officers), i.e. Subedars and Jemadars, were addressed by name with the suffix "Sahib". However, owing to the scarcity of Dravidian personal names any unit might contain a dozen or so (for example) Munisamis. and thus to avoid confusion each other rank was addressed by his regimental number, even by his own comrades.

That August Mr Hore Belisha, Minister for War, introduced a promotion scheme to reduce age for rank. I was promoted among the many Sapper Captains forming a group then known as the "hungry hundred." The group stemmed from the large batches passing through the Shop (the old RMA Woolwich) during the latter part of the First World War; large in order to compensate for the heavy casualties among regular officers, particularly subalterns. Armistice Day suddenly provided us with a normal life expectancy. Promotion was a financial boon, but the jobs available were unaffected, and the prestige of rank was diminished.

Following those operations came yet others perhaps less strenuous. For instance on 9 Sep Razcol on light scale, i.e. without tents, though most officers now took lilos for their bed-holes, set out for Torwām, this time ostensibly to collect two 4.5in howitzers from Wanacol. On the 12th the CRE and I motored forward from Chalwēshti to the khassadar post on the Sharawangi Narai which needed 500 yards of new barbed wire entanglement to be erected next day. All was peaceful. Next morning at 0230hrs the infantry set out to storm the narai before dawn and they succeeded without opposition. We, starting at 0500hrs arrived and began work when rifle fire opened from many directions. We were not under direct fire, but it persisted and the job established itself as the noisiest in our entire two years. At Torwām we met with Wanacol, a detachment from 9 Fd Coy under Captain Lionel Paton and Lieutenant "Buzz" Lloyd. We shared the water point duties. Despite searching for them no mines were found throughout this expedition.

Then on 29 Sep Razcol, with two of our sections, marched for an unknown destination. We made Datta Khēl by the MT track from Gardai, leaving one section with Michael Biddulph under Scouts' protection on the Lwargi Narai to dismantle their temporary post. Next day we left Datta Khēl for Murki *Karēz* on hard rations, meaning tea and sugar and pre-cooked Shakapura biscuits for Indian troops, and hard "ships biscuits" for the British. Actually there were evening rum rations for all barring Muslims who received extra tea. Murki Karēz, SW of Datta Khēl, had been visited by Razcol in peaceful conditions but they had never camped there. This year it had for some while been a proscribed area over-flown by the RAF with orders to drop bombs on any movement noticed in it. I went forward in a light tank to reconnoitre the water situation and found 9,000 gallons an hour gushing from an underground source. All was quiet. The water point was later installed in record time, only to be pulled back by the Commander (Brigadier H V Lewis) for safety. Shooting started before dismantling was complete, and one *bhisti* received unscathed a bullet through his paggri. Diverted to a channel the water became so gritty that it fouled the pump valves, and access for animals was difficult. The narrow valley was flanked both sides by steep scrub-covered jagged hills making the pinpointing of sniper positions impossible, and the fighting continued till 2230hrs. Next morning three of the four battalions reconnoitred a further 1,000 yards into the nallah stirring up the hornet's nest once again, and once more 2230hrs marked the enemy's lights out. We had spent that day mending the *karēz* to produce an ample clean water supply at the camp site. No less than eleven unexploded RAF bombs, all of 1918 vintage, were detonated within the proscribed area, all still potentially dangerous in the wrong hands. Then on the way home from Lwargi we dealt with several mines. Reaching Razmak on 6 Oct I recollect speculation in the Officers' Club and Messes that night that Ipi's propaganda might well be proclaiming a victory, emphasising that about fifty of his troops (as estimated) had repulsed 4,000 men with 1,500 animals and costing us four men and five animals killed. Had it been worth the effort?

Birdie Sutherland left us for leave three days later. The next column occupied from 9th to 20th December. It was decreed necessary and urgent to overawe the Manzai Mahsuds for failing to control their hotheads. Razcol, with Wanacol, which included 9 Fd Coy under Lionel Paton and Bob Lindsell established a camp about four miles up the nallah leading NW from Kōtkai which is situated at the confluence of this nallah with the Tānk Zām. Wanacol remained there while Razcol on light scale operated forward into the heart of dissident territory expecting strong opposition. It never materialised, and the māliks burned the dissidents' houses, which was to have been our task, under the eyes of the PA. It had been noised abroad that Razcol would return the way it had come, and it transpired that a battle would have ensued had we done so. Instead Razcol proceeded forward to Ladha in peace. That night it rained heavily until there was an inch or so of water in our foxholes, but it soon turned to snow which fell uninterruptedly until the next evening. Visibility was limited to a few hundred yards, and an enterprising enemy could have wreaked havoc. The hard going was physically exhausting, but for once not a shot was fired on this usually contested last leg to Razmak.

There was no respite for us at the beginning of 1939. In the first week, leaving administrative and workshop details behind, the rest of us marched the two stages to Damdil, coming there under the command of 1 Bde. This project was for building a road to run roughly due east along the Khaisora River and to join the existing network at Biche Kashkai. As the District Commander, Major-General Quinan, having tea in our mess tent, told us: it would be not only a useful short cut in troublous times, but would also dispel the belief held by the tribesmen that roadworks were to stop. Work began on 11

Jan with a large infantry working party down the river bed from where it diverged from the circular road. They returned to Damdil that night, but next day the road was completed to within 1,000 yards from their first camp site at Zerpazai, which they then occupied with one of our sections. The rest of us reverted to Damdil. The road was found to be adequate for 6-wheeled trucks, but owing to the wet state of the nallah bed one 4-wheeler sank to its axles. The last 1,000 yards was finished by noon on the 13th, and we, less one section with the Bde and less our mules and drivers, departed by MT for Mir Ali. Michael Biddulph, aware that two motor ambulances were to accompany the convoy, spotted one such broken down by the roadside, and when it reached Mir Ali he ordered it into the local MT workshop for checking. Work was under way when plaintive calls came from the inside. It was the CO of the 3/17 Dogras sick of a fever and due urgently in hospital. This ambulance had not belonged to our convoy!

On the 15th we moved by MT to Biche Kashkai with armoured cars and a half a battalion for escort, all of whom camped with us alongside the local permanent Scouts' post. The two ambulances were with us, together with three American "Caterpillar Diesel Road Builders", then locally known as "Monsters" (but later universally as bulldozers, with their MES (Military Engineering Services) operators under a Staff Sergeant; also a section under Lieutenant "Buzz" Lloyd from 9 Coy who had some experience with these machines in Wāna whereas we had none. Work on the road began on the 17th westwards along the north bank of the river. The CRE and I, reconnoitring forward, came upon some unexpectedly soft shale and a complex of intricate and deep sided nallahs which the air photographs, taken with the sun shining into them, had not revealed. The south bank proved to be easier, so, next day, with District approval, we began on a fresh alignment, the Sappers clearing obstructions on the raghzas, the Monsters coping with the cut and fill around the nallahs. That evening the 9 Coy details and the machines moved to 1 Bde's new camp at Dakai Khula whither also we went on the 20th. The work was finished two days later, one less than scheduled, and the CRE driving over all the new road at 30mph congratulated all concerned. In fact the time allowed provided for no drainage, so this road was unlikely to survive rough weather. It had been a peaceful episode apart from three long range shots one evening into Biche Kashkai camp, of which one wounded an RIASC mule, and another had smashed the glass of a Petromax lamp in our company *baniah's*<sup>2</sup> tent. This marked the end of road work for us. I was back in Razmak on the 24th coping with mountains of accumulated paper, and I spent the remaining few weeks handing over to the advance party of 10 Fd Coy and supervising our packing. Two sections meanwhile remained detached with brigades down country: splendid training for their subalterns whose exploits are unchronicled.

There were congratulatory letters from the Brigade and District commanders, and at last we made our final bow on the Waziristan stage at Bannu station on 27 Mar, carefree and unaware of the fate that would find 12 Coy, alas without me, mobilised in Egypt after so very few months, and waiting for the imminent catastrophe.

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<sup>2</sup> The Company *baniah* was a civilian merchant who contracted to supply a canteen and the ex-ration messing requirements, e.g. vegetables, to our satisfaction, plus a regular contribution to company funds.