



83rd Wallajahbad Light Infantry - Return from Active Service, 1921

Introduction

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The clerk of the Weather was on his behaviour when on the morning of June 24, the 83rd Wallajahbad Light Infantry arrived in Cannanore after over four year active service in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf. Though the monsoon rain had been falling almost without ceasing for ten days previously, the Wallajahbads were favoured with a bright clear morning for their detraining and subsequent march to the barracks, where the mend were regaled with pillau prepared by the staff of the Depôt, which recently came to Cannanore from Trichinopoly to await the arrival of the Regiment from Overseas. All the men will now go on a well-earned leave for a couple of months before, commencing again on a peace footing.



Indian infantry, from the time of the First World War.
From a contemporary postcard.

The photo does not necessarily portray the 83rd Wallajahbad Light Infantry, but is shown here as an example of Indian Army uniforms.

History of the regiment

In view of the return of the "Wallajahbads" from Overseas, a short historical sketch of this, one of the oldest of the Madras Regiments, will not be out of place.

Known as the 33rd Madras Native Infantry, the 83rd Wallajahbad Light Infantry was raised by Captain E. Tolfrey, at Madras, in 1794. An interesting and valuable document now in the Officers Mess is a monthly return of all ranks for December, 1794, signed by Captain Tolfrey and headed "A Monthly return of the Honourable Company's 33rd Battalion of Native Infantry (5th Brigade, Commanded by Captain Edward Tolfrey, Fort St. George, 1st December, 1794."

In 1799 the Regiment, now renumbered and called the 1/12th Regiment of Madras Native Infantry, took part in the final war with Tippu Sultan, and one portion of the Regiment was present at the assault and capture of Seringapatam, the name of which is borne on the colours of the unit. During the ensuing troublesome years the Regiment was constantly on service in the Mahratte country and on the border of Mysore. In the second Mahratta War the Regiment took part in the battle of Nagpur, and the name "Nagpur" is also borne on the colours. In 1824 on the reorganisation of the Madras Battalions, the Regiment became the 23rd Wallajahbad Light Infantry, which number it retained until 1903, when the present designation was given.

At the insurrection at Kittoor in 1824 the "Wallajahbads" received a special mention in a dispatch from the G.O.C. Bombay, for a specially rapid forced march from Sholapur "notwithstanding the impediment of several wide and rapid rivers for the crossing of which they had to seek their own means." "Kittoor Day" - the regimental day - in commemoration of this, is celebrated yearly on December 6. This appears to have been the last active service of note that the regiment was engaged in for many years, though it is interesting to note that during the 36 years, ending 1835, the regiment spent upwards of 23 years in camp or on active service.

Burma and the Great War

In 1885 the regiment, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel J.H. Gordon, proceeded as part of the Expeditionary Force to Burma, for which it bears the words "Burma 1885-87" on the Regimental colours. Two detachments were employed in the later operations of 1891-1892. Drafts were sent to the 63rd Palamcottah Light Infantry for service in China during the Boxer Rising of 1901.



*The band of an Indian Army infantry regiment at the time of the First World War.
From a contemporary postcard.*

The photo does not necessarily portray the 83rd Wallajahbad Light Infantry, but is shown here as an example of

Indian Army uniforms.

This postcard was acquired together with the previous one, and portrays most likely soldiers from the same unit.

Since the outbreak of the Great War to the present year the 83rd Wallajahbad Light Infantry, or parts of it, have been continuously on field service. In 1914 a wing [1\)](#) of this regiment was sent to reinforce the 63rd Palamcottah Light Infantry, its link battalion, before proceeding to East Africa. At the Battle of Tanga the casualties consisted of one British officer [2\)](#) and twelve sepoy soldiers killed, seventeen wounded and several prisoners, of whom one Indian officer and two sepoy soldiers died. This wing remained with the 63rd Palamcottah Light Infantry until 1916, in the month of December of which year they rejoined their own unit in Mandalay. In the meantime, the other wing had proceeded to Jask in the Persian Gulf. The unit, as a whole, was mobilised at Secunderabad in July, 1917 and proceeded to Mesopotamia, where it was met by the wing which had been in the Persian Gulf.

After being successively stationed at Basra, Tanoomah, and Nar Oomah, the Regiment proceeded to the North Persian Force at Hamadan and Kasvin in 1919, where misfortune in the shape of an epidemic of influenza overtook it, the casualties during the period, December 15, 1919, to March 30, being no less than 57. In May 1920, the 83rd Wallajahbad Light Infantry returned to Mesopotamia, where it was stationed at Kut and Amarah during the Arab insurrection of August-November, 1920.

The following officers returned from Mesopotamia with the 83rd Wallajahbad Light Infantry:

British Officers: Captain R.E. Greenhouse (Commanding), Captain EA. Midgley (Second-in-Command), Lieutenant F.W. Deacon, Lieutenant J.E. Heggart, Lieutenant E.S. Simpson, Lieutenant J.C. Robinson (Adjutant), and Lieutenant G.J. Brown (Quartermaster).

Indian Officers: Subadar-Major Mohamed Waizullah, and Subadars Shaik Dawwood, Duraiswamy, Muniswamy Rajoo, Jemadars Abdul Azim, John Francis, V. Jacob, Y. Isaac, Mahomed Ghose, Kasturi, Thiruvengudam, Abdul Jabbar, Sadasvia Naidu, Ramannab, Arulappan, Kolandaveloo, and Subbiah Naicker.

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Noter:

1) A wing normally means half a battalion.

2) The British officer was Captain J.H.M. Fuller, who died on November 4, 1914, and is remembered at The Tanga Memorial Cemetery (Commonwealth War Graves Commission). Refer to the Cemetery Reports section for a list of 394 names of which 392 derives from the November 1914 battle. The site is most informative on regimental names, too.