



Rifleman
(Drill Order).

Gurkha Officer
(Active Service Kit). (Review Order).

Gurkha Officer
(Active Service Kit). (Guard Order).

Bugler

TYPES 1ST BATT. 8TH GURKHA RIFLES.

Footspikes.

418. C. 92. 56
**Sport and Service in
 Assam and Elsewhere**

By **LT. COL. ALBAN WILSON, D.S.O.** ::
 (Late 1st Batt. 8th Gurkha Rifles)

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WITH 20 ILLUSTRATIONS



1-320

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On one occasion I had an adventure there, which gave me food for thought for some days. I was climbing up, and had neared the top, when I saw on the path above, about twenty yards off, our big drummer carrying a bottle, slung by its neck on a bit of string, in one hand, and an umbrella in the other. I felt sure he was taking drink into barracks, which was strictly forbidden, so called to him to wait a moment. I climbed laboriously up, and then asked him what was in the bottle.

He replied, "What bottle?"

"The bottle you were carrying just now."

"I have no bottle," he said, which was quite true.

I looked at his clothes. He certainly hadn't it in his pocket, for it would have stuck out. It wasn't in his umbrella, nor was there any bush or hole in the ground where he could have hidden it without moving, and he stood in the same place all the time I was coming up the bank, so I remarked:

"You've done me this time. Go on!" So he went on his way, grinning.

Some days after, when at pipe practice, I had a brain wave, and said to him, "Duttia, tell me where you put that bottle."

He laughed, and replied, "No, sahib; if I had had a bottle, wouldn't you have found it?"

I said, "I'm not going to run you in, so will you tell me if I am right when I tell you what I think you did with it?"

He agreed, so I told him he had thrown it over my head into the pool as I was climbing up the steep bank and looking at the ground.

He seemed awfully surprised, but admitted this was the case, and asked how I had found out; so I told him that was the only way he could have got rid of it so quickly without moving, for I would never have heard it splash amidst the noise of the water.

This fellow tumbled off an elephant in Burma and broke both his wrists, but made a most wonderful recovery, for he was one of the finest big-drummers I have ever seen, and could do all sorts of fireworks with the drumsticks. He wasn't a

bad piper either, and when he had taught his little son to play the practice chanter, it was quite interesting to see the father blow up the big pipes, put the drones over his shoulder, and keep the bag full, whilst the boy played a march or reel, for his little lungs could not have kept the instrument going.

For a short time after the rains ceased every year there were a few small fish up to 8 in. long in all these local streams, but in a week or two they got so shy from constant harrying by the Khasias, they weren't worth going out for.

Towards the end of my time in the service, Assam at last got a Chief Commissioner, who was a fisherman, and he agreed, as an experiment, to stock the streams in the station with brown trout, the ova of which were got from Kashmir, and to preserve them. This was done just before the war, in 1914, but whether the trout have bred in the streams or not I cannot say, as I have never been there in the fishing season since, but I have seen them, so they should do all right if looked after. During the war they must have had a thin time, and now the Provincial Council is largely composed of natives, who are not likely to do much to further the sahibs' sport. In a few years, except in the native States, where the rulers do not allow their subjects to do as they like, field sports will be a thing of the past, for, if left to himself, no native will observe a close season for fish, flesh, or fowl.

At one time all sorts of regulations were made for a game reserve in the Shillong forest, which were observed just as long as the Chief Commissioner, who made them, remained in office, and he succeeded in getting up quite a nice head of indigenous game birds and small deer.

One day, some time after he left, as I was passing with my company I heard a shot in the reserved forest, extended the men, and soon ringed up a Khasia with a gun which he had just fired.

A report was sent in to the magistrate, and he wanted to know if any witnesses were available, so I offered to send 115, who had heard the shot and were present at the

catching of the culprits, on which he said three would be enough. I heard afterwards the man was let off, because he said he was on his way back from a village where he had been spending the night, and had taken his gun to sleep with, and his reason for firing was that he did not like to take a loaded gun into his house. From my experience of the Khasias, I had hitherto imagined they preferred something softer than a gun as a bed-fellow. Another native I knew was said to shoot a deer every week in the reserve, and I was thinking about catching him, when he saved me the trouble by shooting his sister, whilst she was gathering sticks, in mistake for a deer. He was, of course, tried for manslaughter, but got off, as it was an accident.

Most game reserves in British India are happy hunting grounds for the natives if they can afford to bribe the watchers, for the rewards given for the detention of poachers are so small. In one of the rhinoceros sanctuaries in Assam, the reward given for a conviction of killing one of these beasts was about thirty rupees, or two pounds. Now, a dead rhinoceros is worth several hundred rupees to a native, as his horn, to begin with, is worth its weight in silver, and every bit of his meat, including his entrails, is supposed to be an infallible aphrodisiac, so a poacher who killed one could easily afford to pay the amount of the Government reward to any potential witnesses and yet be well in pocket, for those who got the precious meat would not be likely to give him away. So, till rewards are big enough to make it not worth the outlay for the poacher to bribe witnesses, sanctuaries will always be poached. If a white man broke the rules it would be known at once, for he never goes on a shooting trip without employing many natives in one way or another, and what he does is discussed by them all, with many embellishments.

Fish in India have a much better chance of surviving than game, for they mostly spawn in the rains, and the big ones always drop down the hill streams into the plains, or into the big pools, during the cold weather, and very little harm can be done in the cold and hot seasons in large rivers, if explosives

are not used. They soon get to know all about trapping, and avoid it, and netting in clear water is never very profitable.

Assam undoubtedly affords the best and most varied mahseer fishing in India, but getting to it is the difficulty, for communications in the province are not good in the vicinity of the hills. Whichever river one elects to fish, one has almost always to go a day or two's march from the railway or the Brahmaputra before starting operations; and coolies, carts, or transport animals are always difficult to obtain at short notice. I have had most of my best sport on active service, or on the march, as regards fishing.