

# The Indian Mutiny

1857 - 1858

## What's in a name?

One hundred and fifty years after the events of 1857, there is still great debate in what they should actually be called. The British authorities firmly regarded the event as a mutiny by large sections of the Bengal army. Indeed the British were fortunate that it was only the Bengal Army, with a few exceptions, the Bombay and Madras armies stayed remarkably quiescent. The British recognised that there were a number of fellow travellers who joined in and took advantage of the collapse of authority throughout Northern India, notably Ghazis and Gujars.

Post 1947 Indian Nationalists have thought to refer to the events as India's First Nationalist Uprising. It is clear why they would like to brand this event as a nationalist uprising. It was unusual in that it did attract Muslims and Hindus to the cause, but the event was clearly confined to Northern India in general and Bengal in particular.

The truth was obviously somewhere in between. Undoubtedly, the Bengal Army took the lead through their initial mutinies, but they quickly tried to politicise and widen the event through asking the last Mughal Emperor to reassert his claims and reestablish the old Mughal Empire. This did attract wider support but the old Emperor did not have the energy or the resources to fully take on the power of the British in India. The hoped for general Indian uprising never did take place and despite attempts to escalate the events through various atrocities and sieges, the British were able to reorganise their forces in the Indian sub-continent and slowly but surely reestablish their control over the Bengal and other affected areas. Therefore, you could claim to call these events a mutiny that escalated into a rebellion but it never did hit the hoped for nationalist uprising status. For the sake of convenience and familiarity, I will use the term mutiny throughout although with the understanding that it did escalate further.

## Causes

Again, there is much debate into why the mutiny did break out in India in 1857. For generations, British schoolboys and girls were told that it all had to do with a misunderstanding and mistakes over a new kind of cartridge issued to the Sepoys and Sowars. Indians were told that 1857 was the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Plassey and that



[1857 Map of India](#)  
[1857 Map of Northern India](#)  
[Crutchley's Map of the Indian Mutiny](#)

## Significant Actors

[Bahadur Shah](#)  
[General Anson](#)  
[William Hodson](#)

## Sieges

[Cawnpore](#)  
[Delhi](#)  
 Lucknow  
 Arrah  
 Agra

## Battles

Badli-ki-Serai  
 Chinhat  
 1st Cawnpore  
 Unao  
 Bashirataganj  
 Bithur  
 Delhi  
 1st Lucknow  
 Agra  
 2nd Lucknow  
 2nd Cawnpore  
 3rd Cawnpore  
 Ruiya  
 Bareilly  
 Kotah-ki-Serai  
 Gwalior

British rule would come to an end on that date. These events certainly did occur and were significant in their own right. However the causes of the mutiny were far more varied and interconnected with one another in quite unforeseen and complicated manners.

### ***Religion***

The common thread that will tie most of the factors together and bringing an unlikely alliance between the Muslims and Hindus was the perceived threat to the native religions of the Indian sub-continent. The threat was the increased religious overtones of the East India Company and of the Europeans operating in the sub-continent. In the eighteenth century, the East India Company had been interested only in profit and commercial areas. As the nineteenth century progressed, religion began to play a more important role. Consequently, East India personnel took more interest in religious affairs and allowed more missionary work to be carried out under their aegis. This increased religiosity did not make much of a direct impact in terms of converts, but it was certainly noticed by a growing percentage of the Indian population and definitely by the East India Company's employees the sowars and sepoy. Indeed, more and more EIC officers were making unsubtle attempts to expose their soldiers to Christian teachings.

### ***Losing Touch***

In fact, the East India Company Officers had had a good reputation for mucking in with their soldiers and were known to lead from the front. In the eighteenth century, EIC officers had been real swashbucklers keen to make their fortune at whatever personal cost. They frequently underwent the same privations and dangers as their charges did. This earned the respect and awe of many Indian company soldiers. As time went on, newer generations of EIC officers were not so hungry for success. There were more British officers for starters and so it was easy for them to stay within the company of like minded officers rather than with their soldiers whose needs and wants they increasingly saw as foreign and peculiar. The officers' language skills consequently suffered which further took them out of the loop of understanding. When families started joining the officers, the break down in contact was almost complete. Officers were having to rely on their Indian NCOs who were very often as aggrieved as the soldiers themselves.

### ***Over-Confidence of EIC***

Hand in hand with the loss of touch was the over confidence of the East India Company officials. They had become dangerously complacent about their own invincibility. Winning countless small battles at incredible odds had made the EIC seem impregnable. The

## **Sources**

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## **Documentaries**

## **Timeline**

1857

Jan	Problems in Dum Dum over greased cartridges
Feb	Mutinies at Barrackpore and Berhampore
Mar	Pande Executed
Apr	Unrest at Ambala, 48th Mutiny at Lucknow
May 10	Mutiny and Murders at Meerut
May 11	Europeans attacked in Delhi

fact that they were often using far better technology and were better organised only seemed to confirm their right to rule the sub-continent. Over the past century, the EIC had got side-tracked from making money from the ports of Calcutta and Bombay by supplying exotic goods to the people of Britain and the rest of the Empire. In fact scandal and corruption had already converted the East India Company from a trading company to a provider of government services. Ostensibly, this had been done to stamp out corruption and end the monopoly of the EIC over supplying goods. Actually, it would have the long term effect of changing the dynamics of EIC income. Their income would now come from direct taxation. The only ways to increase income was to increase taxation or to rule over an expanded empire. Neither of these methods would be popular with the Indian population. Whilst the company was making itself more unpopular in the areas it controlled, it would soon find that its armies were tied down in the newly conquered areas and their borders. The ratio of Europeans to Indians in the armed forces in the existing Indian Empire was reaching perilously low levels.

### *Dalhousie's Reforms*

In 1848, James Ramsay, the Earl of Dalhousie, became Governor General of India. It was thought that he would represent a steadying influence on the colony and would control its budget. Dalhousie though attempted to spur on the modernisation and Europeanisation of the Colony. A department of Public Works was set up; telegraphs, railways, ports were all to be built or to be upgraded. The Ganges canal was to irrigate huge swathes of central India. Metalled roads were to be built. A postal system was set up. New engineering colleges were set up. Promotion was to be on merit rather than seniority. Tea plantations were encouraged and provided with the infrastructure to take away their products. He encouraged Christian missionaries and societies to provide missions to care for the needy and low caste Indians. These reforms, and many more, were intended to improve the efficiency of colony in the long run. The short term investment costs though would prove unpalatable and put yet more strain on the taxation system. He would also preside over the resurrection and implementation of the infamous 'doctrine of lapse' which will be expanded upon below. He retired due to ill health in 1856 - just before the mutiny - and was expecting a heroes welcome for his reforms but instead found himself having to defend himself against the charges of having stirred up the socio-economic structure of India to beyond breaking point.

### *Technology*

EIC soldiers and other Indians would view many of the technological changes with trepidation. Steam trains and steam ships seemed to be some ungodly creature that defied the laws of nature. The new

May 23	Panic at Agra
May 30	Mutinies at Muttra and Lucknow
May 31	Bhurtpore Army mutinies
June 5th	Cawnpore 2nd Cavalry Mutinies
June 6th	Cawnpore Siege begins, Mutiny at Allahabad
June 7th	Wilson and Barnard meet at Alipur
June 8th	Battle of Badli-ki-Serai; Massacre at Jhansi
June 11th	Lucknow Police rebel; Neill arrives at Allahabad
June 25th	Nana Sahib offers terms at Cawnpore
June 27th	Massacre at Cawnpore
June 30th	Disaster at Chinhat; Lucknow Residency besieged
July 1st	Indore Mutiny
July 2nd	Arrival of Bakht Khan at Delhi
July 4th	Sir Henry Lawrence dies at Lucknow
July 5th	General Barnard dies
July 7th	Havelock's force leaves for Cawnpore
July 16th	Nana Sahib defeated at first battle for Cawnpore
July 27th	Siege of Arrah starts
July 29th	Havelock's victory at Unao
August 5th	Havelock's victory at Bashiratganj
August 13th	Havelock withdrawal to Cawnpore
August 14th	John Nicholson arrives at Delhi Ridge
August 16th	Havelock victory at Bithur

communications systems threatened many existing castes and businesses. Boatmen would be put out of the haulage business, farmers would find their local monopolies being challenged by cheaper imports from elsewhere in India or even further afield. Mass produced British made goods could be imported far more cheaply and efficiently than the locals could produce themselves. Severe strains were being placed on the existing economic systems by the very tools that were supposed to make India more efficient. Soldiers would have the added complication of new equipment and tactics to adapt to. With the expansion of the Indian Empire, soldiers were travelling further and further from their homes. Expeditions in Burma, the Middle East and further afield also required soldiers to travel over water. For high born Brahmins, this meant the loss of their caste. Technological change brought as many fears as benefits to the Indians in the 1850s.

### *The Doctrine of Lapse*

Simply put, the doctrine of lapse allowed the company to annex the principality of any Indian ruler who died without natural heirs or one who was manifestly incompetent. It was thought that this would be a fairly painless way for the company to expand its Indian Empire (and therefore its tax base) by avoiding any direct confrontations or military annexations. It was hoped that the Indians did not really mind who their rulers were and would fatalistically live with the changes far above their heads. It was hoped that they would appreciate British efficiency and incorruptability. Satara was the first state to be annexed this way, Jaitpur, Sambalpur, Nagpur and Jhansi would follow suit. The practice of Indian princes adopting heirs was conveniently placed aside by Dalhousie. In 1856 the EIC would pick up the richest of the states in this manner. It was declared that the Oudh was being mismanaged by its incompetent ruler and so was annexed. Oudh was a very rich and probably corrupt Indian state but it was one that was understood and appreciated by its population. The British were thought of as inflexible and alien. It was also not appreciated just how large a proportion of the EIC sepoy army came from Oudh. They had been happy to take the King's shilling as any mercenary would, but many of them were horrified to find that their own homes had been annexed in such an underhand and unfair way.

### *Overstretch*

The decade before the mutiny had been a busy decade for both the British and EIC armies. The British army had just been involved in the hugely complicated and disastrously run Crimean campaign from 1854 to 1856. Apart from the manpower costs of this campaign, it was hardly an advertisement to the world on the efficiency of the British Army. Many observers felt that the British might be a paper tiger after all. Azimullah Khan who would later advise the infamous

September 5th	Sir James Outram's arrival at Cawnpore
September 14th	Assault on Delhi
September 19th	Havelock and Outram march to Lucknow
September 20th	Delhi captured
September 21st	William Hodson captures King
September 22nd	Hodson murders princes
September 25th	First relief of Lucknow
October 10th	Agra mutineers defeated
November 9th	Kavanagh escapes from Lucknow
November 17th	Second relief of Lucknow
November 19th	Women and children evacuated from Lucknow
November 22nd	British withdraw from Lucknow
November 24th	Death of Havelock
November 28th	Windham defeated at second battle of Cawnpore
December 6th	Tatya Tope defeated at third battle of Cawnpore
1858	
January 6th	Campbell reoccupies Fategarh
March 2nd	Campbell returns to Lucknow
March 21st	Last rebels removed from Lucknow
April 3rd	Jhansi captured and sacked
April 15th	Walpole defeated at Ruyia

Nana Sahib was just one such observer. He felt that the Turks or the Russians might provide better long term allies for the Indians. The EIC armies had been busy in 1848/9 in the annexation of Punjab and Sindh with the Anglo-Sikh Wars. There had been war in Burma and many smaller scale battles along the frontiers. The Santal Expedition had shown how even poorly equipped peasant armies could cause huge logistical problems for the EIC army. On top of all this was the stationing of the EIC armies in the newly acquired lands. This policy was thought prudent lest the newly acquired peoples rose up against their new masters. The EIC assumed that those areas it had ruled for decades or more were firmly under their control.

### Cartridges



Enfield Paper Cartridge

The infamous cartridge difficulties combined religious sensibilities with technological change. For years the EIC had relied on a simple but inaccurate smooth bore musket. It was decided to introduce a more accurate muzzle loading Enfield Rifled Musket. One way to speed

up the loading process was the introduction of a paper cartridge with the bullet sitting on the exact quantity of powder needed. The loader was required to bite open this paper cartridge to expose the powder. The original cartridges were made in Britain and had been covered in tallow to help protect the cartridge from the elements. Unfortunately the tallow had been made from a beef and pork fat. To the British users of these cartridges, this made no big deal. Hindu and Muslim users were horrified at the defiling fat. The EIC quickly realised its blunder and replaced the animal fat with vegetable fat but the damage had already been done. To Hindus and Muslims alike, their worst fears of being ritually humiliated had been confirmed. Many assumed that this had been a deliberate policy by the Europeans who were looking to impose their own religion on the sub-continent. Battalion after battalion refused to use the new cartridges. Some even refused to handle the cartridges when officers had allowed them the option of tearing open the cartridges instead of biting them. As far as the officers were concerned, refusing to obey an order was tantamount to mutiny as it was. Different commanders handled the situation in different ways - some with more sensitivity than others. The first shots were to be fired by (an inebriated) Mungal Pandey on March 29th at Barrackpore. He protested against the disbanding of a unit that had disobeyed orders to use the cartridges. He shot at a British sergeant-major and a lieutenant and then engaged them in a sword fight. He saw the two of them off but then shot himself in the chest when General Hearsey arrived in the parade ground. The authorities

April 23rd	Rose enters Kalpi
May 5th	Campbell victory at Bareilly
June 5th	Death of the Maulvi
June 17th	Battle of Kotah-ki-Serai, death of Rani of Jhansi
June 19th	Battle of Gwalior
November 1st	Royal Proclamation replacing East India Company with British Government
1859	
March 29th	Bahadur Shah found guilty
April 18th	Tatya Tope executed

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at Barrackpore were fortunate to have the European 84th regiment to hand so that the disarming of the Indian battalions could be done with the threat of force for any sepoys thinking of refusing to hand over their guns. Not all stations would be so fortunate.

### Igniting the Powder Keg

The fears of the sepoys were easily played upon by those who hoped to persuade them to turn their guns against the British. There were reports of nocturnal meetings in the barracks. Mysterious fires broke out, burning arrows were shot into the thatched roofs of officers' bungalows, and the telegraph station at the great military post of Barrackpore near Calcutta was burned down.

Most mysterious of all, flat cakes of flour and water known as chapatis were passed from village to village. A messenger would arrive bearing them, saying that they had been brought to his own village and must be passed on. In time, the news of this strange ritual reached the British officials. What could it mean? Some argued that it was a method of carrying away disease, though there was no epidemic in 1857. When Indians were questioned, some said the distribution of chapatis meant that something terrible would happen, but they did not know what it might be. Others replied that they believed the chapatis were distributed by order of the British, and had not thought to inquire further. Whatever it meant, no one dared to disobey the summons to pass the flat cakes on to the next village, and with the chapatis there spread throughout the land the feeling of expectancy, of tension, of uneasiness.

All of these incidents were reported, and the reports were passed up through various levels of authority until they ultimately arrived on the table of the Governor General. In the highly centralized system of British administration, everything had to be committed to paper and no action could be taken until it had been approved by a higher authority. A torrential flood of paper flowed endlessly towards the Governor-General's office, silting up the channels of communication, stifling all initiative.

Very few, even among the most senior military officers, were prepared to bypass the system. One who did was General John Hearsey, commanding at Barrackpore. As early as the end of January, 1857 he had directly warned the Governor General that there were persons at work deliberately creating trouble among the sepoys, and that something must be done. But even then, the system took control and delayed decision. Early in February, Hearsey decided to take action himself. He ordered a parade of the sepoys at Barrackpore at which he himself would try to reassure them that the British had no designs on their religion.

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Hearsey had the advantage of long service in India; in fact he had been born there. He was now 66 years of age, and his military life had been spent with the sepoys of the Company's army. He was one of the few senior officers who respected the sepoys and received, in return, their respect and affection. Though old by Indian standards, he was still strong and active, a good horseman with a commanding presence. If anyone could persuade the sepoys of the good intentions of the government it was Hearsey. He spoke to the assembled men on February 9 in their own language. His arguments were simple and fluent, and the sepoys believed him. Unfortunately, Hearsey could not speak at every military station. Too often a commander, instead of using persuasion - and, if that failed, taking decisive action - panicked.

Such was the case with a Colonel Mitchell, commanding the military station at Berhampur, some 90 miles to the north of Barrackpore. There were no European troops on the station, only the 19th Native Infantry, a squadron of native cavalry, and a battery of guns manned by sepoys. At a parade on February 27, the infantrymen refused to accept an issue of cartridges which they believed were of the new contaminated kind, though in fact they were not. Instead of attempting to reassure his men, Colonel Mitchell, hurrying to the parade ground, threatened to take the regiment to Burma or to China. Overseas travel was another way that Sepoys believed that they would lose Caste. The sepoys took their commander's angry threats as proof that all the rumours they had heard were true, and their discipline broke. At this point Mitchell became conciliatory, for he feared that the gunners and cavalry might be equally mutinous. The sepoys returned to their duties, retaining their arms. Colonel Mitchell reported the events to Calcutta, and the system finally ground out a decision on March 23 that the 19th Native Infantry should be marched down to Barrackpore, to be disbanded under the eyes of a British regiment, Her Majesty's 87th, which was hastily being brought back from Burma.

That British troops had to be brought from such a distance merely emphasized how few there were in northern India. Most of the European troops assigned to Bengal had been moved west to secure the Punjab when it had been conquered and annexed eight years earlier. At Calcutta there was one British infantry battalion, and another was stationed 400 miles away at Dinapur. One regiment was stationed at Agra, and one at Lucknow. Altogether, in Bengal - an area as large as France and Germany combined - the British in the Company troops and the Queen's forces (lent to the Company by the Crown) amounted to only four infantry battalions and a few individual batteries of artillery. The Queen's forces had already been considerably reduced because of the demands of the Crimean War then raging between Britain and its allies against Russia. In India as a

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whole, there were about 4,000 Europeans in the Company and royal armies, as compared with a total strength of about 300,000 Indian soldiers.

When the news of the impending disbandment of Mitchell's command reached the sepoy at Barrackpore, their faith in the assurances of General Hearsey began to evaporate. A rumour reached the British that on March 10, when the Governor-General and the most important British officers would be attending a fete to be given by the Maharaja of Gwalior, there was to be a general uprising by the sepoy. Because of an unseasonable downpour of rain, the entertainment was cancelled. The day passed without incident, but the rumours of rebellion persisted. The Governor-General was anxious. So was General Hearsey, who decided to address the sepoy under his command once again. Among the rumours at Barrackpore was one that British troops of the 87th, due in shortly from Burma, were to make a sudden attack on the sepoy. On March 17, Hearsey once again reassured his troops: they need not fear for their caste or their religion, he said, for the Europeans were coming only to disband the mutinous 19th Native Infantry.

But the imminent punishment of the 19th - who by refusing the cartridge had steadfastly remained loyal to their faith - had already made a deep impression on Hearsey's sepoy. Nine days later, as he sat in his bungalow, Hearsey received news of a tumult on the parade ground. After sending orders to the British troops to stand by, the General rode to the scene, accompanied by his son John. A shocking sight met his eyes. A young sepoy named Mangal Pande had just cut down two European officers and was now calling on his comrades to rebel and die bravely for their religion. No one seemed to be taking action. In one corner stood a group of British officers, including the commander of the sepoy's regiment, all apparently struck with paralysis. One of these men called out to Hearsey: "*Have a care! His musket is loaded.*" "*Damn his musket*" replied Hearsey, and added to his son: "*If I fall, John, rush in and put him to death somehow!*"

As the General rode towards him, the sepoy raised his musket - then turned it on himself and pulled the trigger. But he only succeeded in wounding himself, and after being taken prisoner was court-martialled, condemned and hanged. His name lived on, for soon the cry of "Remember Mangal Pande I" was to become the Indians signal for revolt, and for the British "pandy" became a general term of abuse for all Mutineers.

The 19th were disarmed and disbanded without incident at the end of March, and the Commander-in-Chief, General George Anson, saw no reason to alter the usual hot-weather routine of the army. Despite continuing reports of barracks mysteriously going up in flames and of secret meetings among the sepoy, European troops were marched to

London, 1956

Wise, J

Diary Of A Medical Officer During The

Great Indian Mutiny Of 1857

Indian Mutiny items on ebay



cooler stations in the foothills of the Himalayas. Officers went on leave. General Anson - who had seen no fighting since the war against Napoleon more than 40 years earlier retired with his staff to the hill-station of Simla, nearly 1,000 miles away from the Governor-General and the civil government in Calcutta.

The officers and their families in the cool of their hill retreats had no means of knowing it, but down on the plains, in the great military cantonment of Meerut, 40 miles outside Delhi, greater troubles were brewing. There, 85 sepoy had refused to accept the new cartridge. They had been court-martialled and found guilty of disobedience and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment with hard labour. On Saturday, May 9, the whole garrison was paraded to witness the sentences being put into effect.

For one young lieutenant, Hugh Gough, who afterwards wrote a vivid account of the Mutiny outbreak, the events of that day seemed heavy with foreboding. Even the weather underlined the menace, for it was dark, with low clouds, and a hot dry wind blowing across the parade ground where some 4,000 men were drawn up to form three sides of a hollow square. The sombre light seemed to heighten the silver-grey of Gough's own 3rd Light Cavalry, the shining brass helmets and leather breeches of the Bengal Artillery officers, the black horsehair plumes of the Dragoon Guards, the olive-green of the 60th Native Rifles, and the scarlet coats and white collars of the Native Infantry.

On the fourth, open side of the square stood the 85 sepoy. They were clad in their uniforms, but their feet were bare and they carried no weapons. Their comrades, rigid at attention, carried arms, but everyone knew that their ammunition pouches were empty - by order. The British troops had their rifles, the new Enfields loaded with the cartridges that had caused all the trouble, and aimed at the Native Infantry. Gaps in their ranks showed the open mouths of guns, at each breech a gunner at the ready.

A British officer stepped forward and a ripple ran through the ranks. Slowly he read from a paper, an Indian officer translating his words into careful Hindustani. When they had finished there was silence for a moment, then a party of British soldiers moved down the file ripping the buttons from the uniforms of the 85 sepoy and the coats from their backs. Armourers with tools and shackles came forward and slowly began to fit fetters on the condemned men, many of whom had served the British government with perfect loyalty through long years and bloody battles. As the fetters were placed upon them, they lifted up their hands, beseeching the General to have mercy on them, but seeing no hope there they turned to their comrades and reproached them for standing aside and allowing them to be disgraced. Many of them were in tears, but they could do nothing in the face of the loaded field-guns and rifles, and the glittering sabres

of the Dragoons. For a moment, it seemed to Lieutenant Gough as if the sepoys were about to attack the British with their bare hands; but the prisoners were marched off and the tension eased.

That evening Gough went down to the temporary jail and was deeply moved by the grief of the men who begged him to save them. Later, in the dark of the veranda, he wondered what would happen next. His thoughts were interrupted by a rustle in the darkness. It was a native officer of his own troop who had come, he said, to discuss the troops' accounts. Gough found this odd, especially as the man seemed frightened and kept carefully to the shadows. Then the real purpose of the visit was revealed. Tomorrow, Sunday, the sepoys would mutiny - all of them, even the cavalry, the sahib's own men. They would break open the jail and release their comrades. Death was planned for the white soldiers and their families.

After the man had left, Gough went to the mess and informed his colonel, George Carmichael-Smyth. His story was greeted with laughter. When he had been in India a little longer, he would learn not to take such stories seriously. But Gough was convinced that the native officer had come to warn him of a real danger. He went to the Brigadier commanding the station, Archdale Wilson, and was treated with good-natured contempt. If no one else was worried, why should Lieutenant Gough concern himself?

The next day was May 10, 1857. About 5 p.m. a rumour spread in Meerut bazaar that British troops were coming to seize the sepoys' arms. Sepoys in the bazaar hurried back to their barracks as an angry mob of villagers surged out to attack the Europeans' bungalows. On the parade ground, sepoys intent on releasing their imprisoned comrades slipped away from white officers desperately trying to control them. 'When Gough went out on his veranda an hour later the horizon was a sea of flame. Galloping down to the cavalry lines, he found *"a thousand sepoys dancing and leaping frantically about, calling and yelling to each other and blazing away with their muskets in all directions."*

By nightfall, Meerut was a city of horror. British officers had been cut down by their own men. Two officers' wives were murdered in incidents which acquired particular notoriety. One of them, a Mrs. Chambers, was pregnant; her unborn child was ripped from her womb by a local butcher. The other, a Mrs. Dawson, was recovering from smallpox; to avoid contagion, the mob threw burning torches at her until her clothes caught fire and burnt her to death.

The suddenness of the attack caught the senior officers off balance. Most were old, and had not had to fight since their youth. Though there were as many British troops in Meerut as there were Indians, and though the British had artillery, nothing was done to organize a

response. Some of the younger officers, like Gough, tried to give their seniors a sense of urgency. But the mutineers were able to break open the jail, release the 85 prisoners and set off on the road to Delhi, 40 miles away to the south-west, unmolested by the British.

No one pursued them, and next morning the first of them reached the old imperial capital. Some went to the palace, the great red sandstone fort from which the Mughal emperors had ruled all India before the coming of the British. [Bahadur Shah](#), the last of the Mughal line, now called - by courtesy of the British, who paid him a pension - "King of Delhi," did not welcome the sepoy, though they hailed him, as his ancestors had been hailed, "Emperor of Hindustani." But inside the palace there were also men who had waited long for an opportunity to do something against the British who had usurped the Mughal power. They welcomed the sepoy as liberators, and all the romantic appeal of a once great native dynasty rising again was grafted on to the confused aims of the mutineers.

There was little or nothing that the few British officers and civilians in [Delhi](#) could do against the three native regiments stationed there, the mutineers from Meerut and the retainers of the King. The arsenal, one of the largest in India, was inside the city walls and guarded only by native troops. The main magazine was some three miles outside the city, having been moved there a few years earlier for added security. That, too, was guarded by native infantry. By nightfall of May 11, the Europeans in Delhi were in a bad way. Some escaped, some were prisoners in the palace, but many had been killed either by their own men or when the arsenal was blown up to prevent it from falling into the hands of the mutineers. The magazine however remained intact and was handed over to the mutineers; its 3,000 barrels of powder were saved to sustain the mutineers for three months against the forthcoming counter-attacks of the British.

Yet all was not well for the rebels inside the city. They set up an alternative government, a "*Court of Mutineers*," but it was torn by rivalries between the various factions. Hindus, Muslims, sepoy, civilians and Mughal princes. All treated the Emperor, who was little more than a reluctant symbol of revolt, with open contempt. He even had to threaten suicide to save his closest confidant from death. Many princes preferred to play for safety by casting their lot with the British, now belatedly gathering their forces to strike back at the rebels. It became increasingly clear that the disunited force of mutineers would have very little chance of resisting a strong counter-attack.

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### **A Year of Bloodshed**

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On the evening of May 12, General Anson was host to a Simla dinner party of 25. The wine and the talk were good, and when he was

handed a telegram, he set it aside under his plate. When the ladies had left the table, he opened the flimsy blue form. It was from Delhi, "*We must leave office,*" he read. "*All the bungalows are on fire, burning down by the sepoy's of Meerut. They came in this morning. Mr. C. Todd is dead, we think. He went out this morning and has not yet returned. We learn that nine Europeans were killed. We are off. Goodbye.*" Already, two days had been lost. The telegraph was new to India and the line from Delhi went no further than Ambala, a distance of 66 miles from Simla.

The news, though it did not shock Anson into moving down into the plains himself, at least drove him into sending others. But it took time. Troops had to be rounded up from the various hill resorts. Meanwhile, the general wrote to Governor-General Canning that he awaited more information before he would proceed to Ambala. When the news came, the worst fears were confirmed.

On May 15, Anson and a force of some 6,000 men left for Ambala to organize the recapture of Delhi.

The task was formidable. Anson had the troops, but little ammunition and no transport. In an excess of economy, the army had lost its transport department some time before and had now to depend on civilian contractors. As no campaigns were ever mounted in the hot weather, much of the transport had been dispersed. As for ammunition, most of it had been stored in the great magazine at Delhi, which was thought to be secure.

While at Ambala, Anson was bombarded with telegrams - from the Governor-General, who ordered him to "*make as short work as possible of the rebels who have cooped themselves up in Delhi*" and from John Lawrence in the Punjab. Lawrence had himself moved ruthlessly against the rebels there. Now he wanted further action. Delhi would open its gates at the approach of British troops, he assured Anson. "*Pray only reflect on the whole history of India. Where have we failed when we acted vigorously? Where have we succeeded when guided by timid counsels?*"

Such advice was not a great deal of use to Anson, but he did move, with only 20 rounds of ammunition a man, and none for his artillery, without medical supplies and with no bullocks to pull the guns. The whole of the little force reached Rarnal, some eight miles from Delhi, by May 30.

Three days earlier, Anson had died of cholera after handing over command to Sir Henry Barnard, who had at least seen action in the Crimea. Barnard decided to march without delay, supported by a reinforcement from Meerut under Archdale Wilson. Together, they met a force of mutineers some six miles from Delhi at Badli-ke-serai.

After a sharp engagement on June 8, the British put the mutineers to flight. Elated with this initial success, Barnard and his troops moved on to Delhi.

The British occupied the old military cantonments outside the city, on what was known as the Ridge. As a gesture of defiance, they burnt the barracks - and left themselves without shelter from the grinding sun which was to beat down upon them for over three months in the hottest season of the Indian year. It was soon obvious that the British were not strong enough to take Delhi. The force on the Ridge numbered about 5,000 men, while the mutineers in the city had over 30,000, a figure increasing every day as more and more reinforcements came in brigades of cavalry and infantry, their regimental colours bearing the names of British victories flying bravely, their bands blaring British marching tunes. The British lacked not only men and guns but also dynamic leadership; heatstroke and cholera took a heavy toll. General Barnard himself succumbed early in July, and his successor was soon too ill to exercise command. The next senior officer was Archdale Wilson, hardly an encouraging replacement for he it was who had hesitated so fatally at Meerut.

The British had to have reinforcements and heavy artillery with which to breach the walls of Delhi, and the reinforcements could only come from the Punjab. Fortunately, there was John Lawrence who, while ensuring the safety of the Punjab, set in motion preparations for reinforcing the British outside Delhi with a massive siege-train: great guns drawn by 16 elephants and accompanied by over 500 waggons bursting with ammunition sufficient, it was confidently stated, "*to grind Delhi to powder.*"

In the meantime, reinforcements had been steadily arriving and, with them, some younger officers anxious for action. Among them was John Nicholson. His reputation was already high, and one officer claimed that he was "an army in himself," but he was also quite sombre and humourless, and his presence cast "*a damper on the gaiety of some who sat around him*" in the Mess.

Nicholson was anxious to get on with the assault. But though Nicholson and others successfully mounted a number of small engagements, there was no possibility of assaulting the city, protected as it was by seven miles of walls, until the siege-train arrived. It did so on September 4, and three days later the first breaching battery was laid against the city walls. By the evening of the 14th, the British had broken into the city but the victory required bitter fighting and many casualties.

That night the guns were quiet, but the British soldiers found and broke open the cellars of merchants dealing in European liquors. One

eyewitness wrote: *"A black or a green bottle filled with beer or wine or brandy was more precious than a tiara of diamonds."* Most of the British force spent two days in an orgy of violence, drunkenness and confusion, *"utterly demoralized"* wrote Captain William Hodson, *"by hard work and hard drink. . . . For the first time in my life, I have had to see English soldiers refuse repeatedly to follow their officers."*

When Archdale Wilson finally ordered the remaining liquor stores to be destroyed, there was still much to do in clearing the city of the remaining rebels, but by September 20, the city was in the hands of the British. The inhabitants were driven out into the countryside while the city was given over to plunder.

Meanwhile, elsewhere, the Mutiny had spread. Soon after the fall of Delhi to the mutineers, the British communities in two other cities, Lucknow and Cawnpore, in the former Kingdom of Oudh, were threatened with extinction.

Here, 250 miles south-east of Delhi, the British were faced not only with a military rebellion but with what seemed like a mass revolt. The former King of Oudh was in comfortable exile in Calcutta, but his subjects remained behind in chaos and poverty. The state forces had been disbanded and armed soldiers had turned to banditry. The thousands of servants and tradesmen who had been employed by the King were left without a livelihood. New taxes pressed heavily on the people. A new tax on the use of opium drove thousands of addicts to suicide.

### **The Mutiny Spreads**

During April, the British in Lucknow had made preparations for the coming crisis. In charge was Sir Henry Lawrence, brother of John. Under his guidance, the Residency was fortified. It stood to the north of the city on a raised plateau backing on to the River Gumti, and contained a number of buildings, offices and bungalows. All round this area were mosques and houses which overlooked the defences, giving fine vantage points for would-be attackers. Despite requests by his officers, Lawrence refused to demolish the Indian buildings. From any sound military viewpoint, then, the Residency was almost indefensible.

When the news of the outbreak at Meerut reached Lucknow, the situation immediately became dangerous. Buildings were set on fire, and armed Indians began to gather in the city and to attack European positions. By early June, the thin web of British rule had been broken. *"Every outpost, I fear, has fallen,"* wrote Lawrence on June 12, *"and we daily expect to be besieged by the confederated mutineers and their allies."*

Forty-two miles away at Cawnpore, another garrison was already

fighting for its life. Cawnpore was the headquarters of the command that covered Oudh. In charge was Major-General Sir Hugh Wheeler. A man in his early seventies, he had served in India for 54 years - and none of them had prepared him for what he was now to face.

Cawnpore was a large station, with many European and Eurasian families. To protect them Wheeler had only 60 European artillerymen, on whom he could rely absolutely. The rest of his troops were Indian.

There were two possible strong points, One was the magazine, which contained large stocks of weapons and ammunition. It stood only a little way from the river, which could have been used for a getaway in an emergency. The other consisted of two barrack buildings in the open, well away from the river, near the main road from Allahabad. The barracks, which had no defences, were chosen and surrounded by an inadequate entrenchment, though to a competent soldier the disadvantages of the position should have been obvious.

Near Cawnpore, in the town of Bithur, lived a man known as the Nana Sahib. The Nana was the adopted son of a prince who, after defeat by the British, had been settled in luxurious exile at Bithur, For 33 years the British paid the Prince a lavish pension; but when he died in 1851 they refused to continue paying it to his adopted son. To Nana's appeals the government turned a deaf ear. The Nana, living in indolence and luxury in his palace - even financing his own body of troops - bided his time. Noone seemed to suspect that he might harbour a deep grudge against the British. He remained on the friendliest terms with the British and, in particular, with General Wheeler and his Indian wife. It is probable that the General asked his advice and received an assurance that, should the sepoys mutiny, they would make for Delhi and leave the British in Cawnpore alone. Certainly, Wheeler trusted the Nana implicitly; after deciding on the barracks as his own defensive position, the General invited him to take over the magazine and the Treasury with his household troops!

The Nana occupied these two points and waited. On the night of June 4 nearly all of the sepoys mutinied, burning their barracks before looting the Treasury. Some of those who did not do so joined Wheeler inside the entrenchment. The mutineers - as the Nana had foretold left for Delhi. Wheeler felt that all he had to do was wait for reinforcements, which he expected at any moment. He was soon disillusioned. The sepoys had halted only a few miles up the road.

On June 6, Wheeler received a letter from the Nana Sahib saying that he intended to attack the entrenchment. Within a few hours the area was surrounded by the rebels, and the guns from the magazine that Wheeler had handed over to his friend were dropping roundshot on the barracks. Behind a feeble rampart four feet high and made of loose earth were 240 men and 375 women and children. The sun was

at its hottest, gunbarrels burned the hand that held them, and there was little or no protection though about 60 years later a huge underground room was discovered below the barracks that would have given cool and bullet-proof protection. Unaware of its existence, the garrison was protected from the mutineers' heavy artillery fire only by shallow trenches.

The death-toll among the defenders grew steadily. On June 23, the anniversary of the Battle of Plassey, a great assault was beaten off. But food and water were scarce, and the route to the well was open to heavy fire from the mutineers. By June 25 the ammunition was almost gone and starvation confronted the garrison in the face. There was no sign of relief, but on the same day the Nana offered terms of surrender. Wheeler himself was opposed to surrender, but others thought that some attempt should be made to save the women and children.

A written treaty was drafted and accepted, by which the British were to surrender their guns and treasure and theil march out of the entrenchment with their hand-arms and 60 rounds of ammunition for each man. The Nana was to provide boats to transport the women, the children and the sick.

On June 27 what remained of the garrison marched out towards the landingstage. The sick and the women were carried out in palanquins, and the children who could not walk were carried by some of the sepoys who had been trying to kill them a few days before. By 9 a.m. all were embarked in large clumsy vessels with thatched roofs which looked, from a distance, *"rather like floating haystacks."* Suddenly, and without warning, a shot was heard. Fearful of treachery, and with nerves tattered by three weeks of siege, the British immediately opened fire. The Nana's men replied with grapeshot and ball, and the little fleet was soon ablaze. One boat succeeded in getting away, and four of its occupants finally reached safety.

Of those who survived this last battle, the men - 60 in number - were killed by the Nana's troops; the women and children were first imprisoned in a large house and later moved to a smaller one built by an English officer for his native mistress (hence its name, Bibighur, meaning "House of Ladies"). On July 15th, news reached [Cawnpore](#) that the British were approaching the city. Nana Sahib ordered all the remaining prisoners to be killed. His motives for doing this remain obscure. Perhaps it was out of blind rage, perhaps to rid himself of those who might give evidence against him, perhaps in the extraordinary belief that the approaching forces would then have no remaining motive to press home their assault in order to rescue their imprisoned countrymen.

Towards evening, five British men fugitives from elsewhere captured



over the past few days - were taken out and shot. Then a party of sepoys was detailed off to execute the 210 women and children. Apparently unable to bring themselves to commit such cold-blooded murder, they-fired high. Butchers were then summoned from the bazaar and together with two or three of the Nana's troops went in to finish the job with knives. It was not efficiently done. A few were still alive in the morning, among them some children, saved perhaps, by the crush of bodies in the darkness. In the morning, the victims were dragged out and thrown down a near-by well. Some sepoys said that the children still alive were killed first, others that they were tossed alive into the well.

It was this atrocity above all which inflamed British feelings when the relief forces under General Henry Havelock arrived to begin the assault on Cawnpore two days later.

The recapture of Cawnpore was the first stage on the way to relieving the Residency at Lucknow. The 2,000 troops, racked by dysentery, cholera and heatstroke, took ten days to advance the 100 miles from Allahabad to Cawnpore. When they entered the town, on the 17th, they still hoped to bring release to the women and children imprisoned there. Instead they found a slaughter-house. *"I am not exaggerating,"* wrote one officer, *"when I tell you that the soles of my boots were more than covered with the blood of these poor wretched creatures."* Blood-stained clothing was scattered about, as well as leaves ripped out of the Bible and out of another appropriately titled book, *Preparation for Death*

The British left the room untouched, and filled in the well only partially; so that they could stand as terrible reminders to new troops from England that their duty must be sustained by a desire for revenge. One soldier, his head full of tales of atrocities, reported: *"I seed two Moors [Indians] talking in a cart. Presently I heard one of 'em say 'Cawnpore.' I knowed what that meant; so I fetched Tom Walker, and he heard 'em say 'Cawnpore,' and he knowed what that meant. So we polished 'em both off."*

Revenge was not confined to ignorant soldiers. At Cawnpore, Brigadier-General James Neill issued an order on July 25 that every captured rebel, whether proved guilty or not, *"will be taken down to the house and will be forced to clean up a small portion of the bloodstains. The task will be made as revolting to his feelings as possible... After properly cleaning up his portion, the culprit will be immediately hanged."* The guilty men, of course, had fled long before Neill arrived. Neill proudly reported that *"a Mohammedan officer of our civil court, a great rascal"* had objected. He was flogged, and *"made to lick up part of the blood with his tongue."* Then, in Old Testament terms expressing the fanatical desire for vengeance which infected many British, Neill concluded: *"No doubt this is a strange*

*law, but it suits the occasion well, and I hope I shall not be interfered with until the room is thoroughly cleansed in this way.... I will hold my own, with the help and the blessing of God. I cannot help seeing that His finger is in all this - we have been false to ourselves so often."*

Neill's ferocity was not exceptional. The British, enraged by the murder of their women and children in Cawnpore and elsewhere, were already responding with a reign of terror. By the middle of June, 1857, they had begun what one 19th-Century historian of the Mutiny, I.W. Kaye, called a "*Bloody Assize*." Indiscriminate lynchings were commonplace. "*Volunteer hanging parties*," wrote Kaye, "*went out into the districts, and amateur executioners were not wanting to the occasion. One gentleman boasted of the numbers he had finished off quite 'in an artistic manner,' with mango trees for gibbets and elephants for drops, the victims of this wild justice being strung up, as though for pastime, in the form of figures of eight.*"

Hanging, however, was usually thought too good for mutineers. When the facilities were available, it was usual to blow them from guns. It was claimed that this method contained "*two valuable elements of capital punishment; it was painless to the criminal and terrible to the beholder.*" The ritual was certainly hideous. With great ceremony the victim was escorted to the parade ground while the band played some lively air. The victim's back was ranged against the muzzle of one of the big guns and he was strapped into position. Then the band would fall silent and the only sound would be the faint crackle of the portfire, as it was lowered to the touch-hole. With a flash and a roar, an obscene shower of blood and entrails would cover both the gunners and observers.

While Neill was engaged on his personal vengeance at Cawnpore, Havelock set out for Lucknow. He was, however, opposed not only by large bodies of mutineers, but also by heat-stroke and disease. Though he was victorious in a number of engagements, his troops were too weak to follow up their successes, and twice he was forced to fall back on Cawnpore. There he was able to regain sufficient strength to defeat, on August 16, a large force of mutineers who attempted to retake the city. But reinforcements arrived, and on September 19 Havelock was at last able to set out once again to relieve the long besieged people in the Lucknow Residency.

Inside the Residency, the garrison of 1,800 British men, women and children, as well as 1,200 native soldiers and non-combatants - had been holding out against a force of well over 20,000 Indian mutineers.

The siege had been precipitated by an ill-advised attempt by Sir Henry Lawrence to destroy a body of rebels at a place some ten miles

from the Residency on June 29. The sortie had ended in a rout, and Lawrence had been compelled to retire on the Residency area before all his preparations there were complete. On the following day, he withdrew the garrison from the Machchi Bhawan, blowing up 240 barrels of gunpowder and five million rounds of ammunition when they left to keep these supplies from falling into the hands of the Indians.

The defence of the Residency was a nightmare. Because of Lawrence's refusal to demolish the mosques and houses surrounding the area, the defenders were under fire from the near-by rooftops, suffering from what the military commander, Colonel Inglis, described as *"our very tenderness to the religious prejudices and respect to the rights of our rebellious citizens and soldiery."*

Casualties were high. The deadly sniper fire was soon supplemented by heavy artillery. On July 1 a shell burst in the room occupied by Lawrence. On being pressed to move to a safer place he replied that he *"did not believe that the enemy had an artilleryman good enough to put another shell into that small room."* He was wrong. About 8 a.m. the next day, while he lay exhausted on his bed, there was *"a sheet of flames and a terrific report."* To the cry from one of his aides, *"Sir Henry, are you hurt?"* he replied *"I am killed."* His pain dulled by chloroform, Lawrence survived for two days. In his conscious periods he dictated orders and requested that on his tomb should be placed the simple inscription: *"Here lies Henry Lawrence who tried to do his duty. May God have mercy on him."* In the night of July 4 he was buried with other dead in a large pit.

At least the men of the garrison had their duties. But the women and children were confined to the cellars, and lived a terrible, separate life punctuated only by alarms and deaths. Food was rationed, each person receiving *"attar or flour, which we made into chupatties; rice, dhal or peas; salt and meat."* There were no proper cooking facilities so everything was cooked together, with ship's biscuits and some water, into a stew. *"But as the saucepan was of copper and could not be relined during the siege, the food when it was turned out was often perfectly green - hunger alone could make it enjoyable."* The children suffered most. The heat was intense and there were no coolies to pull the punkah fans. When the besiegers attacked the Residency, all the lights had to be put out and the children lay trembling in the darkness until the defenders had routed the Indians.

The rebels in Oudh had few military leaders of any quality, but among the civilians there was a woman of strong character and sense of purpose. The Begum Hazrat Mahal, who had begun her career as an dancing-girl, had caught the eye of the King of Oudh and borne him a son. After the rising in Oudh, the sepoys approached a number of the exKing's concubines. to persuade them to put up one of their 'sons

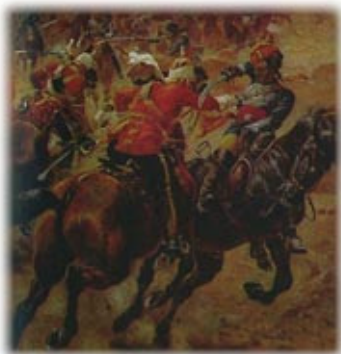
as king. All refused until it came to the turn of Hazrat Mahal. She immediately agreed that her ten-year-old son, Birjis Qadr, should be proclaimed King and that she should be Regent during his minority. William Roward Russell - correspondent of the London Times - noted in his diary: "*This Begum exhibits great energy and ability. She has excited all Oudh to take up the interests of her son, and the chiefs have sworn to be faithful to him.*"

A "government" was formed under Hazrat Mahal's authority and proclamations were made over the seal of King Birjis Qadr. The Begum toured through Oudh and was in constant correspondence with other leaders of the rebels. Little of this was known inside the Residency, for news was hard to come by. But a native spy was several times able to make his way through the rebel forces to Havelock's camp; and on September 23 a letter came from Sir James Outram, who had been sent to supersede Havelock but instead volunteered to serve under him until Lucknow was relieved. In his letter Outram informed the commander of the garrison that the relieving force would be there in a few days.

On September 25, after bloody fighting, Havelock battered his way through to the Residency. "*The half-famished garrison,*" wrote Havelock, "*contrived to regale me, not only with beef cutlets, but with mock turtle soup and champagne.*" But Havelock and Outram could do nothing in return. The force they had brought to Lucknow was not strong enough to break out again.

Reinforcements, however, were by now arriving in India in ever-increasing numbers. With them came two generals who were to bring the campaign against the mutineers to an end - Sir Colin Campbell and Sir Hugh Rose. On November 9, Campbell advanced with 5,000 men on Lucknow. To guide him, Outram sent Henry Kavanagh, who had volunteered to make his way through the rebel lines 'disguised as an Indian. It seemed a foolhardy enterprise, as he was nearly six feet tall, with red-gold hair and beard, and blazing blue eyes. But, made up with lampblack, he succeeded in reaching Campbell. On November 16, Campbell entered the city. He had moved slowly, careful not to risk unnecessary lives, but his caution - commendable in itself proved self-defeating because he allowed his enemy to escape time and again, and the campaign was prolonged.

Campbell slowly cleared the city of rebel forces as the garrison in the Residency made preparations for the evacuation. As the early darkness descended on November 19, the sad remnant of the garrison marched out. Campbell made no attempt to hold the city. He did not have the troops, and there were more pressing calls; at Cawnpore he had left General Windham with only 500 men to guard the one bridge by which mutineers fleeing from Lucknow might cross the River Ganges. Outram and Havelock were left, with 4,000 men, in a walled



Relief of Lucknow

park four miles from Lucknow. There, weak with dysentery, Havelock waited for death. *"For 40 years,"* he told Outram, *"I have so endeavoured to rule my life that when death came I might face it without fear."* It came on the morning of November 24.

Campbell's weary men hurried towards Cawnpore, hampered by the women and children who were refugees from Lucknow. Windham, faced by a rebel force of some 20,000 men under the command of the best of the rebel generals, Tantia Topi, reluctantly had had to give ground. But with Campbell's arrival, the British took the offensive, routed Tantia Topi and saved Cawnpore.

The campaign was by no means over. It was three months before Campbell could retake Lucknow in March 1858, and it was not until May, with the successful action at Bareilly in Rohilkhand, that large-scale operations in the north came to an end.

The fall of the two great centres of the revolt, Delhi and Lucknow, marked the beginning of the end, and many mutineers realized it. The civilian leaders of the Mutiny disappeared, some never to be heard of again. Those who had taken advantage of the breakdown of British rule to pay off old scores or acquire an easy fortune faded into the background from which they had emerged. Only a few, like the Rani of Jhansi and Tantia Topi, fought on to the end alongside their sepoy followers who - as the British had made clear - stood as much chance of death if they surrendered as if they went on fighting to the bitter end.

While Campbell completed his campaign in Oudh, Sir Henry Rose turned on the rebels in central India.

### **The End Game**

Rose, starting from Bombay, made for Jhansi, which he reached on March 21. Before he could besiege the citadel, he had to march out against Tantia Topi, who had recovered from his defeat by Campbell. Once more the Indian was defeated and Rose could return to the storming of Jhansi. Even though the British guns had continued to bombard the city while Rose was away dealing with Tantia Topi, it still looked formidable. The great fort seemed untouched and the Rani's flag still flew defiantly from one of the towers. This remarkable woman, only 23 years old, had been a reluctant rebel. She took up arms after the British accused her of leading a massacre of white women and children. Although there is no evidence of her

complicity in the deed, she was condemned by the British as the "Jezebel of India" and chose to fight. But without hoped for support from Tantia Topi, the plight of the city was serious.

When the British launched their assault, they were met with strong resistance but finally broke through the walls into the city. No quarter was given by the British, even to women and children. Those of the rebels who could not escape, wrote an eyewitness, "threw their women and babes down wells and then jumped down themselves." The fighting went on for some days, until the streets were so full of corpses that all the squares were turned into cremation grounds and *"it became difficult to breathe, as the air stank with the odour of burning human flesh and the stench of rotting animals in the streets."* The British claimed to have killed 5,000 "rebels" in the town, but many must have been innocent citizens.

The Rani was not among the dead. On April 4, she and a small party had left the fort and made for the north gate of the city. Passing through, she avoided Rose's patrols and was many miles away before the British discovered she had gone. A cavalry detachment, sent in pursuit, caught up with the party, and according to some sources the British officer commanding was wounded in a sword-fight by the Rani herself. The Rani and four retainers reached the town of Kalpi the next day, and were joined there by Tantia Topi. Rallying their forces, they descended on Gwalior, an immense fortress held by a ruler loyal to the British. The ruler marched out against the rebels, but his army deserted to them and he himself barely escaped capture.

Rose and his exhausted troops took Gwalior on June 20. Among those who fell in the fighting was the Rani of Jhansi, dressed as a man, her great jewelled sword still in her hand. Tantia Topi escaped, only to be betrayed to the British; he was hanged in April, 1859.

Peace in India was not officially declared until July 8, 1859. *"War is at an end; Rebellion is put down; the Noise of Arms is no longer heard where the enemies of the State have persisted in their last Struggle; the Presence of large Forces in the Field has ceased to be necessary; Order is re-established; and peaceful Pursuits have everywhere been resumed."* So ran Lord Canning's proclamation. The British in the subcontinent and at home began to breathe freely once again

### **Legacy of the Mutiny**

There had been no real danger that British rule in India would be overthrown. The majority of the native soldiers had remained loyal. In fact, without them the British could hardly have suppressed the rebellion. During the attack on Delhi, for example, of 11,200 combatants on the British side no fewer than 7,900 had been Indian.

Large areas of the country remained unruffled by what the Indians called "*the devil's wind*."

Though the British lost at most about 11,000 men, three-quarters of them killed by disease or heat-stroke, the overall cost was high. There are no reliable figures for sepoy or civilian deaths, but many thousands, both guilty and innocent, had perished. The scars of the rebellion were there for all to see. Ruined cities, burnt villages and dead fields ran like a swathe across northern India. The country was further burdened by a debt of £30,000,000 and all the problems of reconstruction. In Britain, the Mutiny did more than produce a wave of hysteria and a desire for vengeance: it convinced the politicians that the British Crown must assume full responsibility from the East India Company for the government of India. This was done by Royal proclamation on November 1, 1858.

One of the first problems which had to be tackled was the reorganization of the army. The Company's white troops were disbanded (and some of those men mutinied in protest). Henceforth there was to be a permanent garrison of British Army troops serving only in India. Regiments of the Queen's forces would do tours of duty and then be replaced. The problem of the Indian element in the army was much more difficult. But two innovations were essential: the proportion of native to British troops was not to be allowed to exceed two to one, and the artillery was to be almost exclusively in the hands of the Queen's regiments. In the Bengal Army, the number of native infantry regiments was reduced from 146 in 1857 to 72, and similar reductions took place in the Bombay and Madras armies. The number of men in each regiment was also reduced to 600. By 1861, there were about 70,000 British troops to 135,000 native troops, and the British held all the arsenals and the principal forts.

The main task of civil reconstruction took many years. The first step was an attempt at reconciliation. The princes, who had generally either sided with the British or had been neutral, were no longer threatened with annexation. Over the years that followed the Mutiny, every attempt was made to show them that their true interests lay with the British, and everything was done to give them a position - albeit empty of real power in the new Empire of India. Recognizing that one of the causes of the Mutiny had been the fear that the British intended to make all Indians Christians, Queen Victoria proclaimed that although "*firmly relying ourselves upon the truth of Christianity and acknowledging with gratitude the solace of religion, we disclaim alike the right and the desire to impose our convictions on any other subjects.*"

Only one of the rebel leaders replied to the Queen's proclamation. The Begum Hazrat Mahal of Oudh, refusing the offer of a pardon and a pension stayed in Nepal, to which she had escaped, and from there

issued her reply. The Begum's "*proclamation*" is an unusual document. It dissected Queen Victoria's text, paragraph by paragraph, and in its way it enshrines the fears and misunderstandings that led to the sepoy revolt. Her criticism of the clause guaranteeing freedom of religious worship is worth quoting, for behind it lies the truth of the tragedy of 1857:

*"In the proclamation it is written that the Christian religion is true, but no other creed will suffer oppression, and that the laws will be observed towards all. What has the administration of justice to do with the truth or falsehood of a religion? That religion is true which acknowledges one God and knows no other. Where there are three gods in a religion, neither Mussulman nor Hindus - nay, not even Jews, sun-worshippers or fire-worshippers - can believe it to be true. To eat pigs and drink wine, to bite greased cartridges, and to mix pig's fat with flour and sweetmeats, to destroy Hindu and Mussulman temples on pretence of making roads, to build churches, to send clergymen into the streets and alleys to preach the Christian religion, to institute English schools, and pay people a monthly stipend for learning the English Sciences, while the places of worship of Hindu and Mussulman are to this day neglected - with all this how can the people believe that religion will not be interfered with? The rebellion began with religion, and for it millions of men have been killed. Let not our subjects be deceived; thousands were deprived of their religion in the northwest and thousands were hanged rather than abandon their religion. "*

What, then, had the revolt been? Was it merely a military mutiny in a part of the army, as the British believed, or a national uprising, as later Indian historians have argued? The truth lies somewhere in between. It was traditional India that had risen against the British, the India which remembered its past, hated the present and dreaded the future that was now absolutely certain to belong to the Westernized Indian, and not to the Indian soldiers or princes.

*Adapted from an article by Michael Edwardes*



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*Stephen Luscombe*