

THE SIYIN CHINS

By

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Origin of the Chins: "I believe some people are of the opinion that they were aboriginal tribes of Upper Burma, and were gradually forced back into the hills, driving back in their turn the Lushais, who dwelt in the hills now occupied by the Chins; the Lushais retreating across the Manipur River still further into the hills.

After our subjugation and occupation of Upper Burma the Chins began to be a thorn in our side, just as they had been to King Thibaw and his predecessors. Thibaw had tried sending an army to invade their country; but it was ignominiously defeated, and the troops retired after doing more harm than good to the prestige of the Burmese army. The Chins told me that they had heard rumours of our fighting in Upper Burma, but they imagined our troops were no better than King Thibaw's, and so, bursting from their hills on sudden and unexpected raids, they pillaged the Burman villages in our newly-acquired territory, slew all who resisted them, carried off into slavery all whom they succeeded in capturing, and murdered such of their prisoners as could not keep pace with them in their rapid retreat to their mountain fortresses.

The Chins further forced themselves into our notice by harbouring dacoit leaders whom we were using our best endeavours to catch — men whose existence at large implied fresh and serious outbreaks of rebellion. When Govt found that the peace of certain of our newly-acquired districts was being rudely disturbed by the hill tribes, negotiations were opened up with them in the hopes that we and they might come to some satisfactory understanding. It soon became apparent that nothing but a punitive expedition would suffice to keep these wild tribes in check".

Punitive Expeditions. — For the last four cold seasons our troops have been operating in the Chin Hills. The first expedition was sent in the winter of 1888-89 under General Faunce. The force started from Kalembo, and advancing towards the Letha Range, met with determined resistance the whole way. As our force advanced we constructed stockaded posts at convenient spots, in which small garrisons were left to guard our rear, furnish escorts for convoys, etc. These posts were known by their numbers, such as No. 2, No. 4 etc. It would take up much space to give any detailed account of the campaign; suffice it to say, we lost many men, chiefly through the unhealthiness of the primeval forests through which the troops worked; and though we drove back the tribesmen as we advanced, still they showed subsequently, by their undiminished misdemeanours, and by the incessant harassing of our posts and convoys that they had not the slightest intention of giving in without further chastisement. Our troops, however, did very excellent work, as anyone will acknowledge who has ever attempted to force his way through a wholly unknown country, and operate in wild rugged hills where no supplies whatever are obtainable, and resisted, as we were by hardy hill-men, who fought us pluckily every step of the way, and know how to turn to the best account every coign of advantage offered by dense jungle or precipitous hill-side.

General Faunce's force pushed down the western slopes of the Letha Range, destroyed many villages, built Fort White, and penetrated, by means of small columns, as far as the principal Kanhau village of Tiddim.

I had been entrusted with the political work of the Northern Chin Hills, and had had the good fortune to succeed in getting in touch with the Siyins, the most warlike of all the tribes; but I knew that our friendly relations with this tribe were in their infancy, and an ill-advised speech, or anything which could be construed into a repulse at the hands of the Kanhaws, would bring the Siyins about our ears again at once. (The above was written and printed some months ago. Since then the Siyins and Nwengals rose and gave much trouble. It is more than two years since I left the Chin Hills, and I do not at all know what caused the rising. Just as the Afghan tribes on the North West Frontier of India (notably those in the vicinity of the Black Mountain) are continually giving trouble, so, I suppose, will the tribes on our frontier in Burma fret and chafe at the power which has been the first to hold their untamed spirits in check).

Dress and Appearance of the Siyin Chins. — Taken as a whole, the Siyins are a finer race of men than the Burmese, and have well-developed arms, chests, and legs, though their average height does not, I think, exceed that of the Burman race. Some of the men have fairly good-looking countenances.

Disposition and Nature — The Siyins are undoubtedly a brave and hardy race. It is their boast that one Siyin is worth five of any other men; and the other tribes, generally speaking, acknowledge their superior pluck. The Siyins are very independent, and the free and easy way in which they put their hands on your shoulder and stroke you is apt to be resented by new-comers, who do not understand that this is not meant for impertinence, but friendship. The Siyins are easily moved to mirth, and readily understand and appreciate a joke. They are by no means dull of apprehension, and I should put them down as a quickwitted, intelligent race, who would readily take to education.

Siyin Villages. — The villages are always built on the hill-sides where either natural springs exist, or where water can be brought from the above by means of wooden troughs. The Siyins, like all other Chins, adorn the outside walls of their chase houses, just where the door is, with trophies of the chase. I have seen hundreds of skulls of all manner of animals, including those of tigers, bears, and panthers. Villages are rarely stockaded all round. Stockades are usually met with wherever the village is most easily approached. The jungle is allowed to grow around a village so as to afford the Chins good cover both for ambuscading and attacking an enemy, or for making his escape from one. The stockades are generally very difficult to attack, being purposely built in spots very disadvantageous to an attacking party; and to take a Chin village which means to offer an obstinate resistance is a task which requires less skill than pluck — pluck of the best quality that can be got.

Volleys fired out of an unexpected stockade, or out of thick jungle at a distance of a few feet, where you cannot even see your enemy, try the pluck of men and officers considerably; and as the Chin almost invariably fires low, the wounds received are usually fatal ones in the stomach. The ground is also sometimes "pangied" — that is, thickly studded with

bamboo spikes, which are difficult to see, and which inflict severe wounds in the leg, and are a formidable obstacle to pass. A Siyin village is a picturesque sight when the apple, apricot, or other trees in it are in full blossom. The Siyin, like all other Chins, is extremely hospitable, and it is thought an insult to go to a Chin village and not partake of the hospitality offered. To get drunk is considered a delicate appreciation of their hospitality.

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THE SIYIN REBELLION

By

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Commanding Burma District

Dated Chindwin River: 21st February 1893:

I beg to note, for the Chief Commissioner's information, the state of affairs in the Chin Hills, as the result of my late visit to Fort White and Haka.

Note on the state of affairs in the Chin Hills in February 1893.

Military Situation: The Chief Commissioner is aware of the circumstances connected with the murder of the Myook and a portion of the escort by the Siyins and Nwengals, and subsequent telegrams and diaries have related the progress of the revolt and of the operations which were deemed necessary to suppress it.

On the first outbreak of the Siyins on the 9th October 1892 the garrison of Fort White was reinforced by two guns No. 7 Bombay Mountain Battery, and 100 rifles with Headquarters, 1st Burma Battalion, under Captain Presgrave, and subsequently by 200 rifles Norfolk Regiment, under Captain Baker, which enable the offensive to be taken with vigour; and General Palmer, Commanding the Myingyan District, arrived at Fort White on the 1st December and assumed control of the operations. As the most effective way of dealing with the revolt was to place military posts at the most important vantage points in the country of the Siyins, General Palmer asked for more troops, and so 300 rifles, 5th Burma Battalion under Lieutenant Taylor, and the Headquarters and 400 rifles, 6th Burma Battalion, under Captain Keary, D.S.O., were added to the force.

Posts were then established at Dimlo, Phunnum, and Montok; and on the 2nd January General Palmer with two guns, 100 rifles, Norfolk Regiment; 50 rifles 21st Pioneers, 200 rifles, 1st Battalion: 100 rifles, 5th Burma Battalion; moved from Fort White across the Nankathe and on the 13th January occupied Kaptial, the principal and most recalcitrant village of the Nwengals. The policy throughout had been to harry the revolted tribe, and to destroy its grain supplies as much as possible. Small parties have been despatched daily from the several posts to search the valleys and ravines, and to hunt up Chins still lingering in the vicinity of the occupied villages. The results have been satisfactory and the tribe is being severely punished. It is difficult to estimate what their losses have been, because in all encounters with our troops the Chins have invariably been seen to carry off their wounded. On our side the losses have been extremely heavy, a total of 53 having been killed and wounded since the operations commenced.