

Nineteenth Century Colonial Conjecture: Small Wars in North-East Frontier Tract

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Abstract:

The plains of Assam were annexed to the territories of the East India Company after the Treaty of Yandabo (February 1826), but for a long time, no attempts were made by the Company to bring the hills and forests of the North-East Frontier Tract surrounding the plains under its direct subjection. Besides, these areas were terra incognita, and the Company's authorities were unsure whether the sparsely populated hills had sufficient economic value or surplus revenue-generating potential. Notwithstanding the fact that these areas were important from the point of view of the defence of the North East Frontier, the tribes proved to be hostile, and their country so impenetrable that the British were content to leave them and their country alone, except for an occasional expedition to punish a particular tribe for committing crimes like raiding or massacring British subjects. These expeditions to punish the tribes were military operations. These military operations in the North-East Frontier Tract can be further classified as "small wars". The present paper delves into these more minor conflicts, which often receive less attention in historical narratives but can still have important implications for the regions and people involved. By probing these additional aspects of the North-East Frontier Tract, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities and significance of military history in shaping historical trajectories and contemporary realities.

Keywords: North-East Frontier Tract, Small Wars, Colonialism, British, Frontier Tribes, Military Expeditions, Gorkha Rifles, Nineteenth Century.

Introduction

The British entered a new world, India, in the seventeenth century, and sought to fathom it using their own ways of knowing and thinking. There was a universal agreement that this civilisation, like the others they ruled over, could be understood and portrayed as a set of "facts". The shape of these facts was assumed to be self-evident, as was the notion that administrative authority was derived from their practical application.¹

With this set of ideas, the East India Company (EIC) entered the north-eastern region of India. The EIC arrived in the area long before Assam was formally occupied after the Anglo-Burmese war in 1826. The year 1771 witnessed the foundation of the East India Company's commercial relations with Assam, for in that year the Court of Directors first recognised the possibilities of trade with that country, and measures were adopted to obtain preliminary information on the subject.² After this, the East India Company's administration, through its agent, gathered information about Assam and Bhutan's resources. Since 1774, when the Raja of Cooch Behar accepted the Company's protectorate as a result of Bhutanese invasions

¹ Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1996, pp. 3-5.

² S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relations (1771-1826)*, Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, Guwahati, 1949, p. 67.

into his realm, the Company's involvement grew even more. In Assam, the Moamaria uprising broke out around the same period, in 1769. Because the political situation in Assam had deteriorated owing to the Moamarias' insurrection, Lord Cornwallis, the Governor General, agreed to send Captain Thomas Welsh to help the Ahom King Gaurinath Singha in restoring normality in Assam.³

Captain Welsh's expedition to Assam (November 1792-July 1794) was a very significant event. This expedition not only helped the Ahom King Gaurinath Singha regain his throne in March 1794 but also led to the discovery of tea, coal, and petroleum in the foothills of the frontier region bordering Assam. It led to the development of the East India Company's economic interests in the area, and Captain Welsh signed a commercial treaty with the Ahom King on 28 February 1793.⁴ It would later lead to significant investments by the Company in the region.

However, the Company that relied on "facts" soon realised that they had so little military or geographical information about the region that bounded Assam in the north. Yet, in this remote corner of their empire, there was more English capital invested in land than in any like extent of their Indian dominions.⁵ Further, English merchants were eager to secure a monopoly over the opium trade in China. Still, Britain did not have a good relationship with Nepal and Burma after the outbreak of the Anglo-Nepalese War (1814) and the Anglo-Burmese Wars (1824-26). So, left with no alternative, the English had to try to find a trade route through the North-East Frontier Tract,⁶ which is the state of Arunachal Pradesh today.

Therefore, to safeguard their investments in Assam, to find a trade route through the North-East Frontier Tract and to probably extend the reach of their administration, exploration was necessary. Hence, for the first time, there was demand for exploration in the region to gather facts.

According to Captain St. John F. Michell of the Intelligence Branch, the exploration in the frontier region was concerned with collecting the following information:⁷

1. *The geographical position and topographical history of each tribe.*
2. *A chronicle containing all critical events connected with each tribe for the last 100 years, showing their military history and political relations.*
3. *Warlike operations against the tribes.*
4. *Routes into the territories occupied by the tribes. This information was to be divided into three chapters in each report:*
 - a) *Topographical*
 - b) *Political*
 - c) *Military*

It ultimately led to the numerous operations in the North-East Frontier Tract in the nineteenth century. And, most of those were military operations aimed at subjugating the warlike tribes.

The plains of Assam were annexed to the territories of the East India Company within a short period after the Treaty of Yandaboo (February, 1826). Still, for a long time, the Company made no attempts to bring

³ Rajesh Verma, *History of North East India*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, first published in 2013, Second Reprint 2017, pp. 62-64.

⁴ C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, And Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries, Vol. I., Containing the Treaties etc. Relating to The Bengal Presidency, Assam, Burma and the Eastern Archipelago*, Office of The Superintendent of Government Printing, India, Calcutta, 1892, p. 200.

⁵ John F. Michell, "Introduction" in *The North-East Frontier of India (A Topographical, Political and Military Report)*, Published by The Superintendent of Government Printing, Calcutta, 1883.

⁶ N. N. Osik, *British relations with the Adis (1825-1947)*, Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 29-30.

⁷ Michell, "Introduction" in *The North-East Frontier of India*.

the hills and forests surrounding the plains of the Brahmaputra, Surma, and Manipur rivers, inhabited by warlike tribes such as the Nagas, Garos, Khasis, Abors, Mishmis, Singphos, Lushai-Kukis, etc., under its direct subjection.⁸ Besides, these areas were terra incognita, and the Company's authorities were not sure whether these sparsely populated hills had enough economic worth or surplus revenue-yielding potential. Notwithstanding the fact that these areas were important from the point of view of the defence of the North East Frontier, the tribes proved to be hostile and their country so impenetrable that the British were content to leave them and their country alone except for an occasional "expedition" to punish a particular tribe for committing crimes like raiding or massacring British subjects.⁹ These expeditions to punish the tribes were military operations.

A military operation is a state's or non-state actor's organised military response to a developing situation. These steps are part of a military strategy to resolve a problem in the state or actor's favour. Operations might involve or be of a combat character. Military operations can be classified by the scale and scope of force employment, and their impact on the broader conflict. While there is a general correlation between the size of units, the area within which they operate, and the scope of the mission they perform, it is not absolute. In fact, it is the mission a unit performs that ultimately determines the operation's level.¹⁰ Further, a military expedition is a military operation by an armed force to accomplish a specific objective in a foreign country. An expeditionary force is an armed force organised to achieve a particular objective in a foreign country.¹¹ While both military operations and military expeditions involve the use of armed forces for specific purposes, military operations typically refer to specific military actions or campaigns.

In contrast, military expeditions encompass planned journeys or excursions undertaken for exploration, conquest, or projection of military power. Military expeditions often involve broader objectives beyond purely military aims and may require extensive planning and coordination. In that sense, the North-East Frontier Tract, now known as Arunachal Pradesh, was a foreign territory for the colonial power in the nineteenth century. Hence, these military actions were a military expedition, which fell under the broader umbrella of military operations.

These military operations in the North-East Frontier Tract can be further classified as "small wars". The term small wars may be said to include all campaigns other than those in which both sides consist of regular troops.¹² Colonel C. E. Callwell, who first in 1896, provided insights into the conduct of small wars, stated:

*The small wars comprises the expeditions against savages and semi-civilised races by disciplined soldiers; they comprise campaigns undertaken to suppress rebellions and guerrilla warfare in all parts of the world where organised armies are struggling against opponents who will not meet them in the open field. It thus obviously covers operations significantly varying in their scope and in their conditions.*¹³

⁸ S. K. Barpujari, "Survey Operations in the Naga Hills in the Nineteenth Century and Naga Opposition Towards Survey", *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, Vol. 39, Volume II, 1978, p. 660.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 660.

¹⁰ David M. Glantz, *Soviet Military Operational Art: In Pursuit of Deep Battle*, Frank Cass and Company Limited, Oxford, 1991, p. 46.

¹¹ Thierry Gongora, 'The Meaning of Expeditionary Operations From an Air Force Perspective', Paper presented at The Seapower Conference, Dalhousie University, Halifax, 7-9 June, 2002, p. 2.

¹² C. E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practices*, General Staff-War Office, Printed under the authority of his Majesty's stationary office by Harrison and Sons, Third Edition, 1906, p. 21.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

Therefore, the expression “small war” has no particular connection with the scale on which any campaign may be carried out; it is simply used to denote operations of regular armies against irregular forces. Callwell further states that small wars include the partisan warfare which usually arises when trained soldiers are employed in the quelling of sedition and of insurrections in civilised countries; they include campaigns of conquest when a Great Power adds the territory of barbarous races to its possessions; and they include punitive expeditions against tribes bordering upon distant colonies. The suppression of the Indian Mutiny and the Anglo-French campaign on the Peiho, the British operations against the Egyptian army in 1882, and the desultory warfare of the United States troops against the nomadic Bedouin Indians, the Spanish invasion of Morocco in 1859, and the pacification of Upper Burma, can all be classed under the category of small wars.¹⁴

These minor conflicts often receive less attention in historical narratives but can still have important implications for the regions and people involved. Small wars might include skirmishes, border conflicts, colonial conflicts, or minor rebellions that do not escalate into full-scale wars involving multiple major powers. They may also involve limited objectives, shorter durations, and fewer casualties compared to major conflicts. Some examples of little wars in history include the Anglo-Zulu War, the Spanish-American War, and various colonial conflicts in Africa and Asia during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These conflicts are often studied to understand their local and regional dynamics, as well as their broader implications within the context of imperialism, nationalism, or colonialism.

By delving into these additional aspects of the North-East Frontier Tract, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities and significance of small wars in shaping historical trajectories and contemporary realities.

Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative historical research design with a descriptive-analytical approach. It systematically reconstructs and analyses the punitive military expeditions conducted by the British colonial administration in the North-East Frontier Tract (present-day Arunachal Pradesh) during the nineteenth century (1826–1900).

Sources of Data

The study relies primarily on primary archival sources:

- National Archives of India (NAI), New Delhi: Foreign Department proceedings (Political-A, External-A, Political), Home Department (Public), and specific consultation files related to individual operations (e.g., Khamti rebellion 1839–43, Kheti/Nocte expedition 1842–43, Singpho uprising 1843, Duffla/Nyishi expedition 1874–75, Naga/Wancho expedition 1875, Aka expedition 1883–84, etc.).
- Arunachal Pradesh State Archives, Itanagar: Judicial Department (Foreign-A, Military-A, Tribal Areas Records) files concerning Adi (Abor/Meyong) expeditions (1858–59, 1894), Apatani expedition (1896–97), Bebejiya Mishmi expedition (1899–1900), and related tour diaries and reports.

These primary sources include official correspondence, political agent reports, military officers' dispatches, tour diaries, survey reports, and expedition commanders' proceedings.

Secondary sources supplement and corroborate the archival data. Key works include:

- Alexander Mackenzie (1884)
- Robert Reid (1942)
- H.K. Barpujari (1976)
- Verrier Elwin (ed., 1959)
- S.K. Bhuyan (1949)

¹⁴ C. E. Callwell, *Small Wars: Their Principles and Practices*, p. 22.

- Contemporary accounts by officers such as J.F. Needham, R.B. McCabe, and R.G. Woodthorpe

Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

1. All relevant archival files were identified through catalogues and subject indexes using keywords such as "expedition", "outrage", "punitive", "hill tribes", specific tribe names (Adi, Abor, Mishmi, Nyishi/Duffla, Aka, Wancho, Singpho, Khanti), and place names (Sadiya, Siang, Dibang, etc.).
2. Documents were examined for details on the causes of conflict, the composition of expeditionary forces, the routes taken, the nature of engagements, casualties, punitive measures, and outcomes.
3. Cross-verification was conducted across multiple primary documents and the secondary literature to resolve discrepancies.
4. A chronological framework was used to organize the operations, while a thematic analytical framework was applied to examine:
 - Classification as "small wars" (following C.E. Callwell's 1896/1906 definitions).
 - Patterns of tribal resistance.
 - Role in colonial knowledge production (mapping, ethnography, demographic data).
 - Frontier policy evolution.

The analysis highlights official colonial perspectives while acknowledging their inherent biases (e.g., portrayal of tribes as "savage", "treacherous", or "mischievous"). This approach guarantees a thorough, evidence-based reconstruction of the military situation in the North-East Frontier Tract during the nineteenth century.

Objectives of the Paper

The primary objectives of the research paper are as follows:

1. To Analyze the Historical Context of British Involvement in the North-East Frontier Tract.
2. To Classify and Analyze Military Operations as "Small Wars".
3. Document specific military expeditions and their outcomes.
4. To assess the Contributions and Implications of these events.
5. To highlight underexplored aspects of colonial military history.

Review of Literature

The present paper is written mainly using primary sources in the form of Archival documents retrieved from the National Archives of India, New Delhi, and the Arunachal Pradesh State Archives, Itanagar. Apart from the primary sources, numerous secondary sources in book form were reviewed for the paper. Mentions may be made of Alexander Mackenzie's book *The North East Frontier of India*, which was first published as *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal* (1884), which records all the military operations, their causes, and course in the nineteenth century till 1882. It is then followed up by Robert Reid's book *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering Assam: From 1883-1941* (1942). Reid's book is the sequel to Mackenzie's. Both books extensively record all the critical military operations in the region from the early nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. Since the present paper deals with nineteenth-century military operations in the North-East Frontier Tract, the two books by Mackenzie and Reid proved very important for gathering information on the topic.

S. K. Bhuyan's book, *Anglo-Assamese Relations (1771-1826)* (1949), acts as a prelude to British military operations in the region of the North-East Frontier Tract. Before delving into the military operations, it is vital to understand the aspirations behind the British arrival in the area. Bhuyan's book provides valuable insights into how the British entered North-East India and cemented their foothold there. Similarly, Bernard S. Cohn's book *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge* (1996) can be studied in the context of

North-East India, where it discusses how the discovery, collection, and codification of information contributed to colonial cultural hegemony and political control.

Verrier Elwin’s edited book, *India’s North-East Frontier in the Nineteenth Century* (1959), is a compilation of accounts by explorers, military officials, and administrators of the North-East Frontier Tract during the nineteenth century. The book focuses on early writings by these people about the region, its tribes, and their activism during the nineteenth century. The present paper focuses on the activism of such military officials in the area during the nineteenth century, drawing heavily on H. K. Barpujari’s book, *Problem of Hill Tribes: North East Frontier, Vol. II* (1976) deals with the critical events relating to the hill tribes and the colonial administration in the region from 1843 to 1872. Many of the events mentioned in the book fall within the purview of the present paper, and the information was crucial to understanding the discourse of the British-Tribal confrontation during that era.

Discussion of the Study

Operations in the North-East Frontier Tract

The following are the major military operations in the North-East Frontier Tract during the nineteenth century discussed in the paper:

Year	Tribe / Group Involved	Location / Area	Main Cause / Trigger
1839–1843	Khamti	Sadiya and surrounding areas	Night attack on Colonel White’s quarters (Jan 1839); rebellion
1842–1843	Nocte (Kheti village)	Kheti hills near Sibsagar	Attack on Khela village; resistance during investigation
1843	Singpho	Ningroo, Beesa, Noa & Boree Dehing	Attack on Ningroo outpost (Jan 1843); slave-related uprising
1848	Galo (Siang Valley)	Siang Valley / Dihing river	Capture of Rangman Hazaree & gold washers by Galos
1855	Mishmi (Mezho clan, Menong)	Somme village, Mishmi Hills	Murder of French missionaries Krick & Bourri (Aug 1854)
1858–1859	Adi (Minyong/Padam section)	Kebang village raids → Sengajan	Raid on Bihia village Sengajan (21 killed)
1874–1875	Nyishi	North of Lakhimpur (Amtollah)	Raid on Amtollah; 40 captives taken (blamed sickness)
1875	Wancho (Eastern Naga Hills)	Nyinu village	Ambush of survey party (Feb 1875); Lt. Holcombe & 80 killed
1883–1884	Aka	Balipara → Tengapani → Medhi village	Raid on Balipara (Nov 1883); opposition to forest reserves
1894	Adi (Padam section)	Siang Valley (Bodak →	Previous raids & resistance

		towards Damroh)	
1896–1897	Apatani	Apatani Valley (near Kodom Garden)	Raid near Inner Line (1896)
1899–1900	Bebejiya Mishmi	Mishmi Hills (Mitaigaon outrage)	Raid on Mitaigaon village (May 1899); 3 killed, 3 captives

Source: Data collected from National Archives of India and State Archives of Arunachal.

The first of these military actions occurred when 500 men from the Khamti tribe attacked Colonel White’s quarters and the sepoy lines in Sadiya on the night of January 19, 1839. They killed Colonel White and wounded or killed eighty others. Despite their success in burning the military station at Sadiya, the Khamtis withdrew. They retreated into the dense forest to protect their families from a counterattack and to plan a retaliation with other hill tribes. Their armed rebellion continued until 1843, after which all the rebel groups surrendered one by one. Colonial troops defeated the Khamti uprising, and about 900 Khamtis surrendered their arms. By 1844, one group of Khamti was settled at Sunpura above Sadiya, a few were near Saikwa south of the Brahmaputra, a third group settled at Dhemaji, and a fourth was placed west of Lakhimpur. This dispersal effectively prevented them from causing any further "mischief."¹⁵

After the Khamtis, the Noctes of Kheti village were next to resist the British troops under Captain J. Brodie in November 1842, when he marched to the hills to investigate an attack on a village called Khela by the Kheti men. Upon reaching the village, they were attacked; the skirmish resulted in the death of a rear guard, with four others wounded and two sepoys losing their muskets. Brodie successfully drove them out of the stockade; the Kheti men fled, and their village was burned. Consequently, Brodie withdrew, and on 23 December 1842, a punitive expedition was launched against the Noctes of Kheti to punish them. The expedition involved three regiments: Captain S. F. Hannay leading a strong force of the Assam Light Infantry, Lieutenant Rowlatt accompanying the 2nd Sebundies, and Lieutenant Reid commanding the Local Artillery Company. During the five days of operations, aside from some spears being thrown and heavy stones rolled onto the troops, the Kheti men never came within musket range. Captain Brodie failed to punish the Kheti Noctes, and shortly afterwards, he left the hills and moved to Sibsagar. However, he left a small party of sepoys under Captain Hannay in the hills, hoping that the chiefs would voluntarily surrender.

The next operation was against the Singphos, who, on 10 January 1843, attacked the outpost at Ningroo in large numbers and killed seven men. A concurrent and successful attack on the guard at Beesa was also reported. It was an uprising said to have been started by the Tippum Raja of Hookoom in Burma, along with the Singpho Chiefs Beesa and Ningroola. All the Singphos on the Noa and Boree Dehing joined in the revolt. Troops moved quickly to confront them. Ningroola surrendered immediately, followed soon after by Beesa Gam. All captured rebels, including those from Beesa and Ningroola, were to be brought for trial. Beesa Gam was found guilty of rebellion and sentenced to life imprisonment at Dibrugarh. The agent’s final report claimed that the leading cause of the Singpho uprising was the loss of their slaves.

In 1848, another military operation took place in the Siang Valley. Rangman Hazaree, the chief of the Behea tribe of gold washers, who was said to have ceased paying tribute after moving to Dibrugarh, was captured along with ten gold washers by men from some Galo villages west of the Dihing. The Galo people of the Siang Valley had long claimed an inalienable right to all fish and gold found in the rivers

¹⁵ Mackenzie, *The North East Frontier of India*, pp. 59-60.

flowing from their hills, as well as full rights over the Mishing, Beheas (gold washers), and fishermen of the foothills. To rescue the captives, an expedition was sent under Captain Vetch, the Political Agent at Sadiya, in February 1848. The force, consisting of 100 armed troops from the 1st Assam Light Infantry, six elephants, and 150 coolies, was commanded by Captain Babbage. They successfully recovered the captives, but at night, they were attacked by around 40 men wielding heavy Daos (machetes). According to local stories, the attackers were led by a man named Bachi Doye. The British troops, well-prepared, repelled the assault. Two coolies were killed, and one sepoy was seriously wounded. To punish this act of treachery, Captain Vetch burned the attackers' village and retreated.¹⁶

In the Somme village of the Mishmi Hills, on 2 August 1854, a Mezho chief of the Menong clan named Kai-ee-sha murdered two French Christian missionaries, M. Krick and M. Bourri. The news reached Assam in November, and by the end of February 1855, a small party of 20 Assam Light Infantry, along with 40 Khampti volunteers and a few hill porters, marched from Sadiya under the command of Lieutenant Eden. After marching for eight days, they reached Kai-ee-sha's village, Du, and captured him. His elder son was killed after he tried to resist his father's arrest. Kai-ee-sha was hanged at Dibrugarh, but not before he had killed two of the guards assigned to watch him in prison.¹⁷

During the nineteenth century, in the Siang valley, two military operations were carried out against the Adi tribe: first in 1858-59 and second in 1894. In 1858, when the men of Kebang village raided Sengajan, a Bihia village only six miles from Dibrugarh, twenty-one people were killed and six wounded. This raid was aimed at punishing the Bihias for seeking shelter under the British government and refusing to pay their tribute to the Adis. The raiders were pursued by a British force led by Captain Bivar, Principal Assistant Commissioner of Lakhimpur. The force tried to follow the raiders into the hills but failed due to strong Adi resistance and the rugged terrain. After repelling the British, the Adis advanced further toward the plains and built stockades. As a result, an expedition was dispatched under Lieutenant Colonel Hannay in 1859. He was accompanied by Captain Bivar, Principal Assistant Commissioner of Lakhimpur; Major Reid, of Assam Local Artillery; Lieutenants Lewis and Davis; and Mr Midshipman Mayo of the Indian Navy, with a force of about 400 men, including 62 Europeans from the Naval Brigade under Lieutenant Lewis. The Adis put up fierce resistance, but the force successfully destroyed all the stockades and burned villages as punishment. However, they did not reach Kebang village, the main perpetrators of the Sengajan massacre.

The other British operation against the Adis was conducted by Assistant Political Officer J. F. Needham in 1894. The force included 100 men from the 44th Gurkha Rifles led by Lieutenants J. A. Wilson and G. L. S. Ward of that Regiment; 300 men of the Lakhimpur Military Police under Captain G. Row, 44th Gurkha Rifles, Lieutenant J. M. Camilleri, 13th Bengal Infantry, and Mr. E. Muspratt, Superintendent of Police; 100 men of the Naga Hills Military Police under Captain W. R. Little of the 21st Punjabis, their Commandant; and two 7-pounder guns under Lieutenant L. W. P. East, R. A., along with a British non-commissioned officer, Sergeant Loweth, all manned by men of the 44th Gurkhas. Surgeon-Lieutenant Birdwood served as the Medical Officer. The main goal of this expedition was to punish a few Adi villages, which Needham accomplished very successfully; however, Needham also attempted to reach Damroh village, which he considered 'the headquarters and stronghold of the Padam section of Adis.' Needham was unsuccessful in this effort, as his troops stationed at Bodak were massacred by the Adis, forcing him to retreat without even seeing Damroh.¹⁸

¹⁶ Mackenzie, *The North East Frontier of India*, p. 36.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁸ *Bodak Massacre of the 26th February, 1894, Judicial Department, Military-A, Tribal Areas Records, August 1894, Nos. 20-79, Arunachal Pradesh State Archives, Itanagar*, p. 70-71.

In 1873, the Nyishis north of Lakhimpur raided a place called Amtollah in Assam and took about forty captives. The following year, an expedition was launched to punish them. A unit of the 16th Native Infantry was sent under the command of Brigadier-General W. J. F. Stafford. It was later joined by a survey mission led by H. H. Godwin-Austen, Deputy Superintendent of the Topographical Survey of India, who was in charge of the expedition survey, along with Lieutenant Colonel J. M. Graham, the Political Officer with the force. The force consisted of 1,000 men and two mountain guns. They set out in November 1874 and encountered no resistance. The captives were recovered, and fines were imposed on the raiders, who, under the leadership of a man named Tana Nana, had plundered and held captives from Amtollah to punish them for bringing sickness to his village, which resulted in many deaths.

An effort to complete the survey of the Eastern Naga Hills in 1875 had disastrous consequences. The Survey Party of 197 men, led by Captain Badgeley and Lieutenant Holcombe, Assistant Commissioner of Jeypore, was treacherously ambushed on 2 February at Nyinu, a Wancho settlement four days' march from the plains. Captain Badgeley and 51 soldiers were injured, while Lieutenant Holcombe and 80 men were killed. After Captain Badgeley rescued the remaining members of the group, a military expedition was immediately dispatched the following month to punish the villages of the Wancho tribe involved. The force was led by Captain John Butler as Political Agent, Colonel Nuttal as the force's commander, Major Tulloch and Colonel Cory with a detachment from the 44th Regiment Native Infantry, and Colonel Sheriff with a detachment from the 42nd Regiment. The force comprised 175 men from the 42nd, 6 from the 43rd, 224 from the 44th, and 56 from the Naga Hills Police, totalling 461 men. They quickly razed the offending villages and retrieved the heads of those killed, along with nearly all of the weapons and loot stolen by the Nagas. In 1876, a small force again escorted a survey party through the hills and burned Nyinu, which refused to surrender some of those involved in the 1875 massacre.¹⁹

On 10 November 1883, about 100 men of the Aka tribe raided Balipara, led by Chandi, brother of Medhi Raja. They carried off the clerk of the forest office, the forest ranger, and two guns. This act was in response to the demarcation of the boundary and the gazetting of the forests as reserves, which the Akas opposed. On 17 December 1883, a flying column consisting of 150 rifles from the 43rd Assam Light Infantry and 50 from the Dibrugarh Corps of the Assam Frontier Police, under Major Beresford of the 43rd, headed for Medhi's village. While negotiations were attempted, the troop's camp was attacked. When the troops advanced to Tengapani, they found it firmly held by the Akas, whose clouds of poisoned arrows the sepoys greatly dreaded. It was necessary to wait for the main force and mountain guns to arrive. On 8 January, Medhi's village, which was strongly stockaded, was attacked and taken. The Akas could not withstand artillery fire and fled. A few days later, the captives surrendered.²⁰

The operation into the Apatani Valley was carried out in 1897. In the winter of 1896, reports surfaced about a raid by some Apatani men near Kodom Garden in North Lakhimpur, which was three miles inside the Inner Line. Since the area was under British jurisdiction, an operation was launched to punish the offenders and recover the captives. The Chief Commissioner supported this plan, writing to the Government of India and stating that a force of 200 Military Police would be sufficient because the Apatanis were a small and relatively peaceful tribe. This number was later increased to 300 on the advice of General R. M. Jennings, General Officer Commanding, Assam. It was decided to send Mr R. B. McCabe, I. C. S., as the Political Officer for the expedition. The force consisted of 300 men from the Lakhimpur Military Police Battalion, commanded by Captain G. R. Row, their Commandant, and Lieutenant H. F. Norie of the 42nd Gurkha Rifles—Surgeon Lieutenant A. Leventon of the I. M. S. served as the Medical Officer, and Mr E. Muspratt, Superintendent of Police, was the Transport Officer. The

¹⁹ Mackenzie, *The North East Frontier of India*, p. 99.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 367-368.

force encountered no resistance when they arrived in the Apatani Valley. The captives were retrieved, and fines were successfully imposed on the raiders.

The last military operation in the nineteenth century was carried out in December 1899 by J. F. Needham against the Bebejiya Mishmis. This operation was launched because, in May 1899, the Bebejiya Mishmis committed an outrage on the inhabitants of a Khampti hamlet called Mitaigaon, which had only one inhabited house and is about sixteen miles northeast of Sadiya, where three Khamtis were killed, and three others were taken. Needham joined the force on 20 December, 1899, and moved into Bebejiya with a force of 290 men under Colonel Molesworth of the 43rd Gurkha Rifles. They faced no resistance and were generally welcomed by many villages. The three children who were taken prisoner were recovered, a captured gun was recovered, and two men were taken prisoner. The operation resulted in the death of a few tribesmen and the destruction of several offending villages. Additionally, in May 1900, a man named Chen Chen, also involved in the Mitaigaon outrage, was arrested and later hanged at Sadiya on 11 September 1900.²¹

Contribution of the Small Wars

In the late nineteenth century, colonial perceptions that direct authority would not generate enough economic rewards to justify the costs of administration overshadowed efforts to find trade routes to China. Colonial discourse not only depicted the rough, humid, jungle-covered eastern Himalayas as a significant obstacle, but it also characterised their people as primitive, isolated, and anarchic tribes opposed to civilisation. Meanwhile, the capitalist Assam plains, where considerable British capital was invested, were viewed as threatened by them. However, a new chapter in the region's history began in the nineteenth century, driven by activism, reports, and accounts from colonial authorities involved in military operations in the area. Through their efforts, they became among the first to collect information on the tribes and the region.

Captain Brodie's letters during his expedition against the Noctes of Kheti village in 1843 recorded crucial information about the area's geography and the distances between Nocte villages, which were previously unknown. Furthermore, in 1875, Captain Butler's reports on an expedition against the Wanchos of Nyinu village detailed extensive geographical information. Additionally, R. G. Woodthorpe, the survey officer who accompanied the same force, provided detailed ethnographic descriptions of the people. His reports were later published in the "General Report on the Topographical Surveys of India, 1874-75, 1876," titled "Notes Descriptive of the Country and People in Western and Eastern Naga Hills." These documents were among the earliest collections of information on the Nocte and Wancho tribes of Tirap and Longding districts in Arunachal Pradesh.

During the operation against some Nyishi villages in 1874-75, several new peaks were discovered, and approximately 2,480 square miles of the Papum Pare and Lower Subansiri districts were mapped. It was during this expedition that the Ranga Valley was first identified. Although its existence was known, no one realised it was so densely populated. Demographic data for the areas around the Dikrong River, Poma River, and Ranga Valley were recorded. The Dikrong area had a total population of 1896, with 632 males, while Poma had a population of 1680, including 560 males. The Ranga Valley was estimated to have a population of about 7,200, of whom 2,400 were males. This information is not entirely accurate, as it was gathered mainly from the Nyishi people. Lieutenant Harman, who travelled from the plains via the Ranganadi River, noted a total of seventeen villages. From the plateau above, the force could see eight large villages, and far to the north, up the Ranga, they observed the plains of the Apatani tribe's country. Based on this information, H. M. Crowe became the first person to reach the Apatani valley in 1889. Later,

²¹ Capture trail and execution of Chen Chen, one of the Bebjia Mishmis implicating in the outrage committed at Mitai gaon in may 1899, Judicial Department, Foreign-A, Tribal Areas Records, October 1900, Nos. 1-27, Arunachal Pradesh State Archives, Itanagar, pp. 6-7.

the 1897 expedition against the Apatanis provided additional details about the tribe and their region. R. B. McCabe, in his reports, described the magnificent Apatani plateau and its dimensions, offering detailed insights into the villages, geography, agricultural practices, ethnography, and an estimated population of around 15,000. McCabe also noted the country's remarkable wealth.²²

There was never a survey of the hills north of the Darrang boundary before the Aka expedition of 1883-84. During the operation, the Tenga valley, now in the West Kameng district, was surveyed. Maps were created with detailed geographical information about the Tenga River, and the hills' elevations were recorded. The expedition report by Captain H. St. P. Maxwell, Political Officer of the Aka Field Force, also provided helpful information about the demography of the Tengapani valley.²³

Similarly, before Needham's expedition against the Bebejiya Mihsmis in 1899-1900, very little was known about them and their land. Needham wrote extensively about the Bebejiyas and their region in his reports. He provided a demographic overview of about 31 villages with 520 houses and a total population of around 3000 to 4000 people, of which roughly 1500 were men. He also described the composition of the Mishmi tribe and the position of the Bebejiyas within it. Needham also made notes on ethnographic details and their trade patterns. These were the earliest pieces of information collected on the Bebejiyas.²⁴ Maps were created during every expedition that charted unknown regions. The tour diaries of officials like Captain H. Vetch, who led the force against the Singphos in 1843 and the Galos in 1848, and J. F. Needham, who led the force against the Adis in 1894, recorded a wealth of information about the people and areas they travelled through.

Conclusion

The "small wars" resulted in successful military operations, during which valuable information was collected. It helped the British government build up knowledge about the area and the strength of the tribes. It provided them with "facts" that could be used for future military expeditions or trade blockades if the tribes committed any crimes in British territory. It also led to a large uncharted area being mapped and the discovery of new land. This information was meant to help them learn about the unknown people and the region, enabling the deployment of modern administration and political control in the area to meet colonial interests in the future, which they did during the first half of the twentieth century. In the twenty-first century, these operations stand as an integral part of the region's history, and a thorough investigation of their history will significantly enhance our understanding of how they served as essential means through which facts about the area began to accumulate.

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²² *Apa Tanang expedition, 1896-97, Judicial Department, Foreign-A, Tribal Areas Records, November 1897, Nos. 15-104, Arunachal Pradesh State Archives, pp. 58-60.*

²³ *Aka Raid, pp. 108-109.*

²⁴ *Elwin, India's North-East Frontier, pp. 346-352.*

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