



**MEDICAL HISTORY OF HILL WARFARE IN COLONIAL INDIA: A CASE STUDY ON TOCHI EXPEDITION; 1897-98**

**Palash Mondal**

*Assistant Professor, Udaynarayanpur Madhabilata Mahavidyalaya, West Bengal, India*

*\*Corresponding Author: Palash Mondal*

**Abstract**

From 1858 to 1914, 51 punitive expeditions were launched by the British colonial government to the mountainous North Western Frontier of colonial India. Tochi expedition was one of them, occurred in 1897. During this period modern Pakistan- Afghanistan border then the border of colonial India was the gateway for Russians to enter in India. To prevent the Russian threat these expeditions played an important role. But in these abrupt climatic condition with a poor line of communication to conduct an expedition was completely a different game for the imperial government. Proper logistical infrastructure and adequate supply of daily ration were the utmost saviour of the army. Along with that active and instant medical support was the pillar of these expeditions. Recent article tries to shed the light on the medical history of the expedition.

**Keywords:** *North West Frontier, Insurgency, Low Intensity Warfare, Medical Culture*

In the context of Indian history writing, colonial North west frontier has been neglected by the historians. But the relevance of this frontier, especially in the late nineteenth century was remarkable. Between 1858 to 1914 almost sixty small scale military expeditions had conducted by imperial government. Internal conflict of that zone and rising threat of Russian power were chief causes behind these operations. In 1759 the British Indian Empire and the Russian empire's border was 4,000 miles apart. In 1846, the distance was reduced and the border of Czarist Russia was 2,000 miles away from British India. By 1885, this gap was less than 500 miles.<sup>i</sup> Period from 1858 to 1914 the British administrative system engaged more in the North West Frontier (hereafter NWF) than any other place of the Indian subcontinent. From 1880 to 1900 colonial Government had launched several expeditions to NWF. In between several disadvantages and obstacles, how did the British authority conduct these expeditions? What medical steps were taken by the Military Department of Colonial India? And the daily life medical culture of the troops in battlefields is one of the key themes of this essay. Both among the professional soldiers and new generations of academic military historians, Low Intensity Conflict has been enjoyed relatively low status in the study of war.<sup>ii</sup> Against that, recent investigation tries to spot the light mostly on the low intensity conflict of the British imperial government in India and seeking to highlight the importance of the unconventional warfare in the peripheral land of the NWF.

The nature and approach of the mountain warfare is totally different from the conventional warfare. Any descriptions of bloody fields of battle, of cavalry charges and heroic actions are uncommon in the mountain warfare. War in the mountains was tiring for the troops and they suffered from combat fatigue. After arduous hill climbing in daylight, the tired soldiers cooked and ate their food in the dark, as no

**Published by:**

**Pather Dabi Educational Trust, (Regn No: IV-1402-00064/2023), Under Govt. of West Bengal, India.**

lights were allowed to prevent the enemy snipers from shooting at the bivouacs, sufficient and immediate medical arrangements and supply of food and water could relief the soldiers in those circumstances.

From 1880's British imperial Officers thought that, if Russian leaders collaborated with local leaders of NWF and launched an attack against the British government, impacts would be dreadful. The Russian 'steamroller' continued to move across Central Asia. This threat was the foremost cause behind Tochi expedition. In March 1885, the Afghan and Russian troops clashed at Penjdeh. Another confrontation occurred in July 1892 at Somatash. The distance between the northern boundary of Afghanistan on River Oxus and Peshawar, the gateway of Punjab, was only 250 miles. In 1896, the Durand Commission established a common border between British India and Afghanistan. As a result of this new arrangement, some 26,000 square miles of impenetrable mountainous terrain with a tribal population of 2.5 million fell under the British sphere of influence. This included the regions of Chitral, Bajaur, Swat, Buner, Dir, Khyber, Kurram, and Waziristan.<sup>iii</sup> Geographically the Tochi valley is situated on the North Waziristan. Along with the medical steps and precautions, how the British Authority did control the local politics in the Frontiers will be an integral theme of this article.

### **Emergence of Tochi Uprising**

From late 1895 and in 1896 situation was going perverse in Tochi Valley. There were several murderous attacks upon individuals. In this condition, it was crucial for the British authority to establishment of military posts and permanent military occupation in Tochi valley. In the summer of 1897 a British representative named Honda Ram had been murdered at Sheranni in Tochi, and the Madda Khel, (name of a tribe) who inhabit Maizar in the lower part of the Shawal valley, considered they had been unfairly treated in the appointment of blood money, levied according to tribal custom for the murdered man.<sup>iv</sup> The matter was still unsettled in June of the following year, when the political officer gave notice that he would visit Maizar to discuss the case, and further to select a site for a new levy post, the construction of which had been decided upon.<sup>v</sup>

Authority had fixed 9 June 1897 for visit, but owing to rain it was postponed to 10 June. It was not possible for the troops to march during rain. Besides that, they always tried to avoid rain to protect them from several diseases. Gets wet through rain could causes pneumonia and fever. Sadda khan and Alambe, local representative of the Colonial Government in Tochi Valley had been sent on one day in advance to make what preparations were required and collect the local maliks for the purpose of discussing the distribution of the fine in Honda Ram's case. Journey started on 10 June from the Datta Khel at 5 A.M and reached to Maizar at 9:30 A. M. The people of the villages round at that time appeared perfectly friendly and talked freely to Pathan Sepoys. Everything required in the way of grass and wood had been supplied; and about midday food which had been cooked in one of the Maizar *kots* was brought down for Sepoys and a special point was made of the British officers partaking of some of it.<sup>vi</sup>

Everything was perfect till lunch. About 2 P.M, when soldiers had just finished their lunch, then the attack actually did take place. During this time, Mr. H. W Gee the political officer was preparing to go round with Captain Browne and look at sites for the levy post. The pipes had begun to play at the request of the *maliks* for the villagers to listen to, and the sepoy and the British officers were seated under the trees. It was seen that something was wrong, and the order to fall in was given, but at the same moment a signal shot was fired which was followed by an irregular volley apparently aimed at the officers under the tree<sup>vii</sup> and situation went beyond control for the British officers.

Under lieutenant Debrett, R. A. reinforcement covered a distance of nine miles in one-and-half hours. They consisted of two companies of the 1<sup>st</sup> Sikhs and extra gun and rifle ammunition. The tribesmen meanwhile, whose number had probably increased to well over 1000, had been kept thoroughly in check, and as soon as the gun was got to work the gathering began to disperse.<sup>viii</sup> After the sudden attack, party had been affected badly.<sup>ix</sup> Several British officers including Colonel Bunny was wounded. After receiving the news of this event, Capt. Cooper of Datta khel camp had been sent immediately two companies with

spare ammunition under the only two British officers left in the camp, which helped the party in a good way.<sup>x</sup> Three British officers were killed and three British officers were wounded during the cross firing.<sup>xi</sup>

On 11 June, with reference to recent attack on the escort of the political officer of Tochi, the Quartermaster General of India, Maj. - Genl. A.R. Badcock immediately sent a letter to the Secretary of the Government of India of the Military department and order issued to Lieutenant-General of the Punjab commanding Forces, in regard to the immediate reinforcement of the garrisons in Tochi Valley and Bannu. For immediate service, troops were interchanged from one place to another in the same climatic region of NWF. For the new personnel's, unruly weather of NWF was always harmful. The commander in chief, for strengthening the garrisons in Tochi and Bannu had sent the 33<sup>rd</sup> Punjab Infantry from Bannu to Tochi Valley, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sikh Infantry from Kohat to Bannu, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Punjab Infantry from Abbottabad to Kohat.<sup>xii</sup> In the hilly landscape Sapper companies (soldiers responsible for tasks such as building and repairing roads and bridges, laying and clearing mines) of the colonial army played a major role. For example, commander-in-chief had advised to the secretary of the military department of India to sanction a section of a sapper company, about 50 men, under a British officer, and a squadron of cavalry held in readiness for immediate service in Tochi Valley.<sup>xiii</sup>

### **Medical Arrangements of the Expedition**

On 17 June 1897, Secretary of the Military Department of Government of India took decision to send a punitive expedition into Tochi.<sup>xiv</sup> The force was styled as Tochi Field Force. Besides holding Tochi, force was directed to operate to the west and south-west of Datta Khel to punish the sections of the Darwesh Khel Waziris concerned in the attack of 10 June on political officer's escort. During the marched towards Tochi, troops were halted in several places, first in Kushalgarh, and then at Datta Khel, after spending three to four days in Datta Khel camp, finally they marched towards the end. After leaving Peshawar valley, they were totally detached from the metropolis. Distance between Tochi and Peshawar valley was 170 miles. Authority had provided extra space in railway for British soldiers moving in hot weather to avoid suffocation.<sup>xv</sup> With that step soldiers can stay fit physically. Quartermaster-General of India also issued of ice to British troops while on railway enroute to Kushalgarh.<sup>xvi</sup> All of these medical steps were taken for the soldiers to kept well in unruly climatic condition.

Primary and crucial section of the Tochi Field Force was infantry army. Most of them were Sikh and Punjab infantry. Squadron army also played a major role in the expedition. Squadron army safeguarded the line of communications, escort convoys, and they were always ready to maintain order.<sup>xvii</sup> During the expedition road engineers and sapper army played an important role. Communication systems always need to be in a better position which had helped the authority to provide food and supply to troops immediately. In the line of communication, a field hospital was arranged and at base a field veterinary hospital was established by the authority for Tochi Expedition.<sup>xviii</sup> In those mountainous landscape animals had played major role in transportation system.

### **Army Camps and Field Hospitals**

To protect the army from hot weather, field hospitals helped them and worked as a resting place. During this expedition troops suffered to an altogether unusual extent from sickness, chiefly diarrhoea and dysentery.<sup>xix</sup> Temperature of Kushalgarh at this time of year was sufficiently high to cause considerable discomfort to the men of the battalion before they reached to their tents. In the Derajat district in midsummer the temperature was hot—115 degree in the tents. The only water to be got was brought up in earthen pots from Indus, which being in flood. Earthen pot was workable to keep water cool and played a significant role in this situation. On 4 July 50 additional European private tents were arrived for the British troops to protect them from the direct sunlight.<sup>xx</sup> These tents were pitched at each camping ground for the accommodation of troops moving along the road and have some special features which are suitable for the hot region. Tent's roof can reflect the sunlight and inside the camp air circulation system was very healthy to give comfort to troops during the summer season. This was an intelligent medical step of the authority.

During the march towards Tochi Valley troops crossed the Derajat district, one of the hottest districts in that zone. It was reported that many officers of the Punjab Frontier Force had openly stated that in their opinions, march up at this time of the year could not be done by British troops. It was only possible through daily supply of ice, sent up in the mail-cart by Government that prevented the loss of many lives during these first few marches. In the early morning the temperature was cool and pleasant enough, but towards the end of the march, when the sun was well up, heat became very great, and during the last two miles into camp many men dropped down from the effect of heat. Sergeant-Major and three private riflemen were down with sunstroke. It was only owing to the unremitting attention of the three medical officers, who were helped the officers throughout that day and night. Every afternoon they faced downpour of rain.<sup>xxi</sup>The supplies of the troops, during this time were packed in water-proof bags.<sup>xxii</sup> In the absence of proper medical facilities and infrastructural accommodation most of the soldiers had lost their life during the expedition.

Authority had reserved of twenty sets of water-gear. Equipment was maintained at Bannu by the Commissariat Department.<sup>xxiii</sup> During the expedition in Tochi, particularly at Datta Khel camp in July-September 1897, effect of daily rain was disturbing for the troops. During the expedition at Tochi, situation was under control by the authority with the help of proper medical precautions and proper arrangements of artefacts.

On 21 July occurred the first death in the Battalion during the expedition. Private Francis the Colonel's batman was dying that evening of dysentery. During this period the scourges of dysentery and fever appeared and grew gradually worse and worse. The hospital tents were full to overflowing, and many men who ought to have been in hospital were unable to be accommodated there, and had to remain in the company tents. During this time the death rate began to get more frequent and it was a common sight to see 100 men marching to hospital when the sick-horn sounded.

During September, deaths among the men at Sherranni, Datta Khel, and Miranshah became sadly frequent; Sergeant-Instructor of Musketry Tyler died on 20 September, and Pioneer-Sergeant Harding on 27 September. Fever and dysentery were very prevalent among the brown soldiers as well as the British. According to the British officials this was the unhealthiest time of the year in the always unhealthy valley.<sup>xxiv</sup> 'Impure Water' was just one among many efficient causes of dysentery and cholera, of which atmospheric changes were most important.<sup>xxv</sup> The health of the battalion continued so unsatisfactory that on September 18, the Battalion marched from Datta Khel for Miranshah, arriving on 19 September. 150 men who were too sick to march with the Battalion were remained at Datta Khel.<sup>xxvi</sup>

### **Role of Animals**

During the hot season animal had played a major role to keep rest to the army. Any disease of the animals can create a massive problem to the force. If the animals suffered from any disease, the movement of army may slow on behalf of the animals. Medical officers of the Tochi Field Force were well aware about this. For instance, the Adjutant-General in India communicated a proposal for the veterinary inspection of all private animals arriving at Khushalgarh and Edwardesabad in view to preventing the outbreak of contagious diseases amongst the animals of the Tochi Force.<sup>xxvii</sup> For the ambulance work animals were only transport for the troops. Riding mules and ponies with riding saddles were substituted for ambulance *tongas* for the field hospitals belonging to the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade. Besides that, animals also brought food and several artefacts to the army from one place to another. For example, the Quarter-Master General in India on 24 June 1897, reported for the establishment of a *tonga* service between Khushalgarh and Bannu.<sup>xxviii</sup> On 1 July, two hundreds camels had arrived from Khushalgarh to Datta Khel to bring the barley and *bhusa* (food of the animals) for the troops and animals respectively. They had bought 5000 *maunds* barley and 10000 *maunds* *bhusa* at Datta Khel and Miran Shah. During the marched towards the Tochi Valley, troops of the both 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade were used the animals. In the summer season mules and camels were used more frequently. Only the cavalry section used the ponies. Authority had appointed three veterinary officers for the animals in Tochi Field Force. On 5 July, the Adjutant General of India recommended the appointment of an additional veterinary officer to the Tochi Force.<sup>xxix</sup> Again on 6

October 1897, authority had appointed a Veterinary-Lieutenant officer named C.B.M Harris as a veterinary inspector of the Tochi Field Force.<sup>xxx</sup>

**List of extra expenditure in connection with Tochi Field Force**

| --                  | Recurring | Initial  | Terminal |
|---------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Extra expenditure   | Rs.       | Rs.      | Rs.      |
| Pay                 | 35,760    | ...      | ...      |
| Commissariat        | 1,71,100  | 20,500   | ...      |
| Transport           | 65,600    | 4,500    | 83,020   |
| Movement of troops  | 65000     | 2,91,700 | 1,60,000 |
| Clothing            | ...       | 1,22,410 | ...      |
| Medical             | ...       | 5,500    | 18,000   |
| Miscellaneous       | 5000      | 15000    | 5000     |
| Total for one month | 342,470   | 4,59,610 | 2,66,020 |
| Add 5 per cent.     | 17,130    | 22,980   | 13,300   |
| Total               | 3,59,600  | 4,82,590 | 2,79,920 |

**Source-** From the Commissary-General-in-Chief To the Secy. to the Govt. of India, Mily. Dept., 28 July, 1897, File No. 4417, Tochi Proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.

From the above-mentioned table one thing is clear that the highest amount of money was spent behind the commissariat and transport system. In that hot region, it was impossible for the troops to walk. Therefore, a large number of camels and horses were arranged by the authority. To keep fit the troops, these animals were played the crucial role.

The expedition was started from June 1897 and continued till 1898. June, July, and September were the summer season in those valleys. But, from December to February the temperature went down. At night troops had to use blankets to protect them from the cold. Besides that, for the sake of rain in September, authority had to take several precautions to defend the army from the rain water. For instance, water proof baggages were recommended for the troops during the expedition. Wadded sunshades were issued by the authority as a precaution. The use of turban was very important as a protective against the sun. The use of analogous clothing by European was also effective. The cost was not exceeded Rs. 1 and the cost was recovered on contingent bills. To protect the foot of the soldiers, authority also arranged hob-nails and toe-plates.<sup>xxx</sup>

The winter scale of clothing was also provided to the troops. From November in the Tochi Valley the temperature went down. For example, in January 1898, the General Officer commanding the Tochi force recommended to the Secretary of the Government of India to sanction the warm-coats to all native troops in the Tochi Valley who were not already in possession of a warm-coat or poshteen.<sup>xxxii</sup> On June 22, the Adjutant-General sanctioned to the issue of goggles and back pads for the troops to protect the spine from the sun. In addition, the wadded sunshades for the British troops were also arranged.<sup>xxxiii</sup>

### **Conclusion**

After the investigating of Tochi expedition recent project have obtained several new findings. In the mountainous arena of colonial frontier, only proper management of daily ration for army and solid infrastructural management could sustain the life of the soldiers. These small-scale operations helped the imperial state to gather knowledge about the mountain warfare, which had helped them to manage insurgencies in other continents during the world wars. Introduction of new modern technologies likes tents, several equipment used by sappers and miners' group and proper execution of these artefacts also shined in this expedition. Lastly, in this abrupt climatic condition, situated completely in an unfamiliar

landscape, proper management of army's health was the ultimate guarantor to succeed. Recent project highlighted the inner mechanism which had work behind to make this expedition successful.

- <sup>i</sup> Roy, Kaushik. *Frontiers, Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies in South Asia*. Routledge, 2015.
- <sup>ii</sup> Moreman, T. R. *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare, 1849-1947*. Palgrave Macmillan, 1998.
- <sup>iii</sup> Roy, *Frontiers, Insurgencies and Counter-Insurgencies in South Asia*.
- <sup>iv</sup> From the Lieut.-General Comdg. The Forces, Punjab To The Adjutant-General in India, Telg. No. 3493-A, 12 June 1897, Simla, Tochi proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>v</sup> Wylly, H. C. *From Black Mountain to Waziristan*. Macmillan and Co., limited, 1912.
- <sup>vi</sup> From H. W. Gee, Esq., Political Officer, Tochi Valley To The Commissioner and Superintendent, Derajat Divn., File No.- 95-C, 19 June 1897, Tochi Proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>vii</sup> From the Station Staff Officer, Datta Khel. To The Secy. to the Govt. of India, Mily. Dept., Simla, Telg. No. 374, 10 June 1897, Tochi Proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>viii</sup> From the officer Comdg. Tochi Valley, Datta Khel to the Sec. To the Govt. of India, Mily. Dept., Simla, Telg. No-376, 11 June 1897, Tochi Proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>ix</sup> From Capt. Cooper, Datta khel. To The Secy. to the Govt. of India, Mily. Dept., Simla, Telg. No. 372, 10 June 1897, Tochi Proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>x</sup> From Capt. Cooper, Datta khel. To The Secy. to the Govt. of India, Mily. Dept., Simla, Telg. No. 372, 10 June 1897, Tochi Proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xi</sup> From The Station Staff officer, Datta Khel, To The secy. to the Govt. of India, Mily. Dept., Simla, telg. No. 374, 10 June 1897, Tochi proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xii</sup> From Maj.-Genl. P. J. Maitland, Secy. to the Govt. of India, Mily. Dept. To the Quartermaster-General in India, No. 1609, Simla, 12 June 1897. Tochi Proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xiii</sup> From Maj.-Genl. A. R. Badcock., Qrmr.-Genl. In India. To the Secretary to the Government of India, Military department, No. 2349, Simla, 13 June 1897, Tochi Proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xiv</sup> From the Adjutant General in India. To the Secy. to the Govt. of India, Mily. Dept., Simla, 17 June 1897, File No. 48, Tochi Proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xv</sup> From the Quartermaster-General in India, Simla. To the Lieut.-Genl. Comdg. The Forces, Punjab, Murree. Telg. No. 2646-A, 19 June 1897, Tochi Proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xvi</sup> From the Quartermaster-General in India, Simla. To the Lieut.-Genl. Comdg. The Forces, Punjab, Murree. Telg. No. 2651-A, 19 June 1897, Tochi Proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Moreman, *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare, 1849-1947*.
- <sup>xviii</sup> From H. W. Gee, Esq., Political Officer, Tochi Valley To The Commissioner and Superintendent, Derajat Divn., File No.- 95-C, 19 June 1897, Tochi Proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xix</sup> Wylly, *From Black Mountain to Waziristan*.
- <sup>xx</sup> From H. W. Gee, Esq., Political Officer, Tochi Valley To The Commissioner and Superintendent, Derajat Divn., File No.- 95-C, 19 June 1897, Tochi Proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xxi</sup> Verner, Colonel Willoughby. *The Rifle Brigade Chronicle for 1897*. John Bale, 1912.
- <sup>xxii</sup> From the Adjutant-General in India. To the Secy. To the Govt. of India, Mily. Dept., File No. 1-T, Simla, 17 June 1897, Tochi Proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> From H. W. Gee, Esq., Political Officer, Tochi Valley To The Commissioner and Superintendent, Derajat Divn., File No.- 95-C, 19 June 1897, Tochi Proceedings, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Verner, *The Rifle Brigade Chronicle for 1897*.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Harrison, *Public Health in British India: Anglo-Indian preventive medicine 1859-1914*, pp.49-57.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Verner, *The Rifle Brigade Chronicle for 1897*.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Proceedings of the Government of India, Military Department, Tochi Field Force, 1897-98, Progs. No.-127-30B, Veterinary inspection of animals at Kushalgarh and Edwardesabad, 2 July, 1897, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Proceedings of the Government of India, Military Department, Tochi Field Force, 1897-98, Progs. No.-70B, Tonga service between Kushalgarh and Bannu, 24 June 1897, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Proceedings of the Government of India, Military Department, Tochi Field Force, 1897-98, Progs. No.-162-63B, Departmental arrangements for the Tochi field Force, 14 July 1897. NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xxx</sup> Proceedings of the Government of India, Military Department, Tochi Field Force, 1897-98, Progs. No.-298B, Appointment of Veterinary-Lieutenant C. B. M Harris, army veterinary department, to be veterinary inspector, Tochi Field Force, 6 October 1897. NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> From the Adjutant-General in India. To the Secy. to the Govt. of India, Mily. Dept. File No. 1-T, Simla, 17 June 1897. NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> Proceedings of the Government of India, Military Department, Tochi Field Force, 1897-98, Progs. No.-464-69B, Issue of warm coats, British Infantry Pattern, to all native troops in the Tochi Valley. Fort William, 18 December 1897, NAI, New Delhi.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Proceedings of the Government of India, Military Department, Tochi Field Force, 1897-98, Progs. No.- 67-68B, Goggles and back pads for British troops, 22 June 1897, NAI, New Delhi.