

My Life in the Arakan Hill Tracts

(Continued)

By

W. S. THOM

(Imperial Police—Retired)

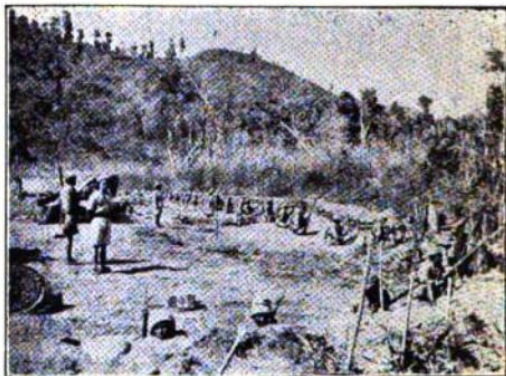
ON the 14th of January my interpreter, Kin We, returned to my camp with information that he had seen the Twiship Chief, Lung Rup, and his people, and that they were holding a conference as to the advisability of coming to see me. Finally, about three o'clock in the afternoon of the 16th, Chief Lung Rup arrived at my camp with a small following. The day before, runners had informed me that he was on the way to my camp, and I had arranged to hold a big durbar the same afternoon. A large number of chiefs and people were in camp, and the camping ground near the river was large enough to hold a considerable concourse.

The durbar duly took place with as much pomp and ceremony as I could possibly arrange with the material available to me out in these wilds. A large circular *mandat* to serve as the durbar hall was erected about a hundred yards from my camp, the approach being decorated with bamboo trellis work on either side. My escort of Military Police lined both sides of the approach and a cordon of sepoy with fixed bayonets was posted round the outside of the hall. Within, the hall was encircled by ten or twelve administered and unadministered Chiefs, who fired a *feu de joie* with their weapons as I approached and at the same time the Military Police presented arms. My elephant (the elephant was an animal that had hardly ever been seen by the majority of those present,

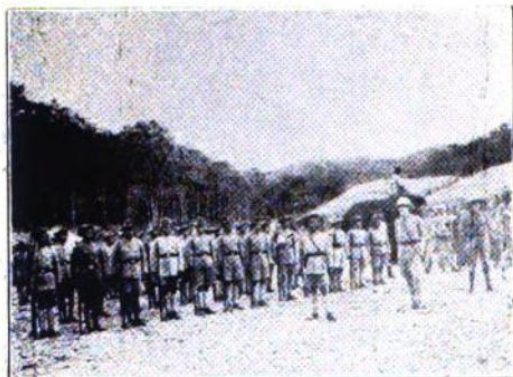
LIFE IN THE ARAKAN HILL TRACTS.



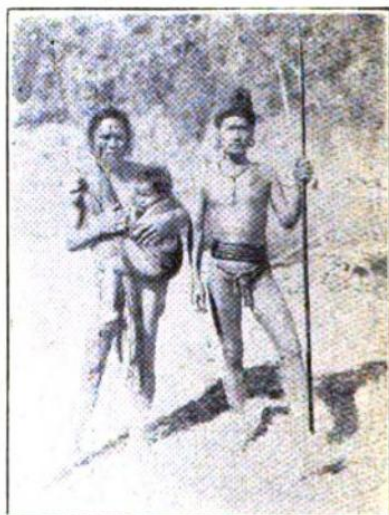
The Author with some of his officers.



The Column in Camp.



The Author with his Escort.



The captured child.



Four Kami captives released by the Column.



A bevy of Kami beauty.

(Photos. by the Author.)

either in its wild or tamed state) put up its trunk on word of command from its mahout, and saluted me as I passed it on my way into the hall.

I was dressed in Khaki uniform and had a long silver-mounted, ivory-handled Burmese *dah* and dagger slung round my waist in true Oriental fashion. A few of the long tail feathers of the peacock pheasant (*daung min*) nodded from my topee. Perhaps this get-up would appear theatrical and unseemly in more civilized parts, and the silver *dah* and dagger together with the feathers used when in uniform would seem to be hardly *de rigueur*. But experience has taught me that, apart from any personal influence I may hold over these people, an occasional masquerade of this sort is tremendously impressive to them, not to mention the assistance it lends to the success of any dealings with these savages. There is no need to attempt to deceive them or tell them untruths, but it is necessary to impress them as much as possible.

The assembled crowd, about three hundred in number, who had turned out for the durbar seemed considerably impressed with all they saw at my camp. The stir created must have been bruited abroad, and subsequently considerably facilitated my further peaceful penetration into the more dangerous parts of the country—parts of which, to the best of my knowledge, had never been visited before by any white man or official.

Some Frontier Officers hold that the only way to treat these and all other savages (who are supposed to consider any kindness shown to them a sign of weakness) is to knock them down first and then to pick them up. This procedure might be suitable in certain cases and might suit some people, but during the twenty years I was amongst them I personally never

MY LIFE IN THE ARAKAN HILL TRACTS

had occasion to fire a shot at these people, nor any reason to treat them harshly. I have never had cause to regret the methods I used nor any measures I took during the many years I dealt with them. In these parts it is extremely easy to find an excuse or create an incident and then start shooting them down to cow their spirits, but I found that as I was a good listener to all they had to say, carefully noting all their complaints, fancied or otherwise, they trusted me implicitly.

I think it was Collie Knox the journalist, author and broadcaster, who said, "Had I a son I would hang the maxim 'Be a good listener' over his cot." It is a virtue which yields a hundred per cent return.

These hill people are reticent, superstitious, suspicious and easily frightened, and if taken the wrong way, could quickly be driven into action which would never occur had they been treated and handled rightly from the first.

It is inadvisable, too, to take risks by rushing about and stampeding the people. A panic might ensue from such action and cause avoidable incidents. It is much better to travel slowly, halting frequently at places for several days if necessary, to give the people time to get accustomed to one's presence, to show them that no harm is intended towards them and that recruits for labour corps are not what we are after.

This latter point was still a matter of suspicion here, especially among the Chins. News in these parts travels fast and far and they had heard of ugly happenings in other parts of these hills. Sir Bertram Carey is commonly credited with having "made" the Chin Hills and it was he who did such a lot in the Great War by recruiting large batches of Chins for the Labour Corps. He was a man of tremendous drive

and personality. A pin could be heard to drop on his entering a room to speak, or while he was actually orating. Personality is a curious thing. It has little to do with birth or with whether its possessor eats peas off a knife. No one has ever been able to explain it, for it defies explanation. It baffles, personality, and is as elusive as truth in a divorce court.

It was during this durbar at Kwideem camp that I produced the large, naked, celluloid doll, about fourteen inches high, with pink cheeks and blue eyes, to which I have referred in a previous article. It created a great sensation. I left it seated on a box outside my camp and as I have related before, men, women and children, their faces expressing sheer bewilderment, crowded round day after day to see the dumb baby with the blue eyes,—and to wonder! These people have no representations of the human race, no carved images in wood, metal or stone like other peoples, although they can recognize an effigy of a human being when they see one.

I had also two powerful hand magnetic batteries going all the time. These, with a large magnet attracting pins and a bunch of keys, a large magnifying or burning glass with which I occasionally lit a cigarette, a humming top, fireworks, such as rockets and Chinese crackers and squibs, created awe and considerable astonishment. A special attraction was a basin of water into which had been inserted one of the brass terminals of the battery attached to the connecting wire, and the people attempted unsuccessfully to pick rupees out of the water with one hand, while holding the other terminal in the other hand. I have already referred to most of these previously, but as this was the durbar at which they figured I have repeated it.

MY LIFE IN THE ARAKAN HILL TRACTS

There were present tribesmen from far and near, of several races of pure blood and others of mixed descent. There were Kamis and Mros talking a different dialect from those Kamis and Mros residing on the Mi and Kaladan rivers within the administered territory. There were clans of Kamis, residing on the Peng and La-U streams, and known as Raingorza, Kaungtus, Kyathein, Kelat; and others whose manners, customs and dress appeared more or less similar but who spoke the Kami dialect with a different accent from that found on the Palet, Mi and Kaladan rivers near my headquarters.

All these people are Animists who, except in cases of unnatural or violent death, burn their dead. Without the faintest notion of a Supreme Being, these races enjoy a happy primitive religion which sees in the mountain streams, trees and woods mysterious spirits whose mission it is to watch over them for good or evil. Superstitious and ignorant to a degree, the hill men look to these spirits for the relief of all their bodily ailments, for protection from contagious diseases, and even from death itself. According to status, suitable offerings are made. Before embarking on any undertaking connected with their daily routine, whether it be the commencement of a journey or the selection of a site for a new village, these spirits must always be consulted. The people have neither priests nor caste distinctions and, though a few Chiefs practise polygamy, it is not common. Divorce is frequent and easily obtained, marriage being regarded simply as a civil rite. At no period do their men or women appear to have inter-married with natives of the plains or to have imbibed their religious or race prejudices. As a result we still find the Hill Tribes of Arakan without priests and gods, and with no mythology.

The Chins are very warlike and stand in a class by

themselves, well apart from the other tribes, and though they do not appear to be as well-built physically as, or any stronger than the other races, they are held in fear. They dress differently and if anything are of shorter stature and perhaps a shade darker than the other tribes. The country along the right bank of the Peng River and inland somewhat westwards is occupied principally by Kamis, Mros and kindred tribes with a sprinkling of one or two Chin villages; whilst the Chins, who are the real marauders and troublesome people of the country, occupy the country on the left bank between the Lemro and the Peng Rivers, northwards and north-eastwards and also along a belt of country extending along the slopes and higher ridges on and near the Yomah mountains running southwards parallel with and to the east of the Lemro River. The Chin villages from which trouble is likely are to be found in the extreme northern latitude 21.33 and longitude 93.25. I refer principally to the villages of Mi Du, Twidaung, Nalaing, Penang and Badupwi, also Klampan, Hultu, We Tu and Yee.

The Kaungtsos live principally along the Mi stream above Sami and along the foothills to the North and East of the Kyaukpandaung plateau. This peak is a very conspicuous flat-topped hill situated some twenty-six miles to the west of Paletwa. It is visible from nearly every high point on the Yomahs and Victoria watersheds. It is a paradise for the egg and butterfly collector. Goral in numbers, the rufous variety of the serow (a species of wild goat that stands as high as a small donkey) and a few bison are to be found on its slopes. A magnificent view of the country in all directions can be obtained from Kyaukpandaung.

From this long digression let us return to the durbar. Some fourteen transfrontier Chiefs with large retinues attended the durbar. I opened the proceedings by

informing all present that it was a good thing for all hill people of different races to come together occasionally at functions of this sort and, after exchanging views over a friendly pot of *Khaung* (rice beer) and an exchange of pipes, to endeavour to settle all their outstandings peacefully. Government disapproved of raids, murders and the kidnapping of people for slavery, and I said that I had come up here to punish a Chief who had raided an administered village and murdered a woman. They must realize that Government's arm was long and powerful and could reach to any part of the unadministered area. It would seize and punish any Chief, be he ever so powerful, who had done wrong by violating Government territory. I pointed out also that, though Government was strong and powerful, it could also be kind, just and generous, and its goodwill would now be shown by my making a few small presents to those transfrontier Chiefs who had taken the trouble to come and visit me here. Presents of packets of salts (much prized by them), brass and aluminium basins, wood-cutting *dahs*, red turban cloth, boxes of matches, reels of thread, needles and beads, all of which were in great demand, were then distributed.

My speech had been translated into their several dialects. After this I went onto the Twiship matter in the hearing of all those present. Paramount Chief Lung Rup of Twiship village on being asked for his reasons for committing the raid on the administered village of Laungdan replied that the raid was committed because Tuk Nan, Hwe Kwi, Rwi Chaing and two other Laungdan villagers had accompanied the transfrontier villagers of Mi Du, Ma Du and Ton Na on a raid against the transfrontier village of Pan Dwi, the inhabitants of which are related to and friendly with Twiship, when five Pan Dwi villagers, Ke Tat,

Ko Taung, Yon Ha, Khum Hai and Pom Neung had been killed, whilst a sixth, Shom Ma who was wounded in the foot, was captured and subsequently released. The Pan Dwi villagers had asked Twiship to attack the village of Laungdan as a reprisal, not being strong enough themselves to undertake the venture. Lung Rup said that he was unable to prove that the Laungdan people mentioned by him had taken part in the raid, except that a buffalo-hide shield belonging to a Laungdan villager named Yum and which had been left behind by the raiders, was found in Pan Dwi village after the raid. (These shields are made generally of thick buffalo or mithun hide).

The Laungdan Chief Yum and Paid Chief Nga Tin of Pengwa were interrogated by me on the question but both denied any knowledge of the raid or of being concerned in it. Chief Yum said that his shield had been borrowed by the Laungdan villagers, before the raid was committed, for use at the funeral rites of his (Yum's) deceased brother, at the cultivation hut of the latter and that the shield was not returned to him, presumably having been left there.

Some time after this the Mi Du villagers asked him (Yum) to accompany them and the villagers of Ma Du and Ton Na in a raid against Pan Dwi. This he refused to do as he said he resided in Laungdan, an administered village, which paid revenue to Government. The Mi Du villagers then departed taking away his shield without his knowledge or permission, used it in the raid and left it where it was found in Pan Dwi village afterwards.

When the shield was found and identified the villagers of Pan Dwi naturally assumed that Yum had been concerned in the raid and that others of the same village must have accompanied him.

MY LIFE IN THE ARAKAN HILL TRACTS

In answer to my questions Paid Chief Nga Tin of Pengwa, in whose jurisdiction Laungdan village is situated, replied that no complaint had been made to him by anyone (and certainly not by Lung Rup or Pan Dwi) that some of the villagers of Laungdan had been concerned in the raid, and that he did not believe that they had taken any part. He was of opinion that the statement had only been made in the hope that the Twiship people might get off lightly in the matter of punishment. He said that had a complaint been made to him he would have taken action and automatically informed me.

This was the first I had heard of the allegations that the Laungdan villagers had assisted in this raid and that Twiship had taken up Pan Dwi's quarrel. I told Lung Rup that if he could prove that Laungdan had assisted in this raid I would most certainly punish them and that he had no right to take the law into his own hands without first applying for redress either to Paid Chief Nga Tin or myself.

It was quite on the cards, of course, that the Laungdan people had assisted in the raid without Chief Nga Tin's knowledge. In the circumstances the Twiship people might have doubted the utility of reporting the matter to him. Moreover, they could not have come to see me at Paletwa as it was too far off. My last visit to Pengwa on the Lemro River and its vicinity had been just before this raid. Twiship is only three or four days' journey from Pengwa and had Chief Lung Rup or the Pan Dwi people only thought of reporting the matter to Chief Nga Tin at Pengwa they could easily have done so.

Pengwa outpost is at a spot on the Lemro where the Peng joins it and is in some of the grandest, wildest and absolutely uninhabited country to be met with in

Burma. Large game of all kinds including the double-horned rhinoceros (*rhinoceros summatrensis*) are to be found along the river, and on the heights above tiger are plentiful. Either bank of the Lemro above Pengwa is a veritable cat-walk as far as tiger tracks are concerned.

It was at Pengwa that I experienced two most extraordinary adventures, on different occasions, when I was sailing down the Lemro in a dug-out, fishing for mahseer. We had just started to race down a long rapid stretch and I was standing up playing what subsequently proved to be a forty-six pound fish. The boat was wobbling badly, and I had just given my two boatmen orders to make for the shore so that I could play the fish from there, when I suddenly heard a snarl and a huge splash to my right amongst some pools and rocks near the shore. It was a large tiger rising out of his bath in a pool and which had started to walk up the bank of the river in a leisurely fashion about twenty-five paces from the boat. That I was astonished is to put it mildly. Putting my rod down I grabbed for a .355 Mannlicher Schonaur magazine rifle ready loaded in the boat, but I found it impossible to use it, as I was unable to steady myself sufficiently for a shot. The tiger finally disappeared amongst the undergrowth. As the heat was intense, the animal had undoubtedly entered the stream to have a bath after having gorged itself on some animal it had killed, the carcass of which was probably lying in the undergrowth the tiger entered. I was disappointed at losing the tiger but I landed the fish after playing it for about twenty minutes. The gravel beds and banks of the Lemro are so beautifully devoid of all jungle and undergrowth that the work of playing and landing a fish is made much easier than is ordinarily the case,

MY LIFE IN THE ARAKAN HILL TRACTS

My second adventure occurred two years after that told above. I had been about twenty-five miles up the Lemro River on another expedition fishing for mahseer. I was returning to camp in a dug-out. It was getting late and the light was fast fading. As we rapidly turned a bend of the river, I suddenly caught sight of what, in the bad light I took, at first, to be a large number of black rocks scattered about in the river and also on both banks. As I could not remember having seen these rocks before and had noticed nothing of the sort when coming upstream, I was questioning the boatmen about them, when our ears were suddenly assailed by a succession of ear-splitting screams and trumpeting from a herd of forty or so wild elephants. We were travelling rapidly and it would have been impossible to stop the boat. The run of the stream carried us right through them—but how we got through them unscathed to this day I am unable to tell. That we were extremely lucky cannot be questioned. The good steering on the part of the boatmen was also contributory to our escape. The elephants, which were all around us, were just as panic-stricken as we were. The stream at this point was only about seven feet deep. We all but collided with one angry female, with a calf, which screamed at us in a most terrifying manner, and we almost brushed against the shoulder of a young bull which seemed to me, after it had swung round, to be stretching out its trunk to seize our helmsman. Though it takes long to tell, it was all over in a few seconds. Travelling at the rate we were, had we bumped into one of these animals we should have been capsized and I shudder to think what would have been our fate. I am convinced I would not have lived to tell the tale.

(To be continued)