

SECRET

By Maj ZC Bakshi (1949)

(From the National Archives of India)

THE TIBETAN ARMY

1. Strength, composition and location

The Tibetan army is about 8000 strong. There are approximately 10 Battalions in it. Names of some of these Battalions are:

KUSUNG (The Body Guard)

TRAPCHI

MAGYO

There is no fixed strength of any of these battalions. Normally battalions are now approximately 900 strong. Neither is there any fixed scale of weapons and equipment for these battalions. They are armed with rifles, brens and sten guns. It is believed that they have also got a few 2 in. mortars.

The Tibetan army has got 12 to 15 2.75 guns which are believed to be locked up in LHASA. Some men and officers have been trained to fire these guns by I.A. [Indian Army] instructors. Most of the troops are stationed at CHAMDO, the most important place in Eastern Tibet. At present there are 5000 troops there.

Next to CHAMDO in importance is NAGCHUKA in Northern Tibet. There are only one hundred troops there. In addition there are 800 militia men who are armed with old [one line missing] ... men are in LHASA. 500 men of TRAPCHI Regiment in YATUNG.

2. Method of recruitment

Method of recruitment is feudal. Each landlord provides a certain number of men for the army. These men are always from the poorest classes. As no pay is given to the soldier, not even the poorest men show any inclination to join the army. However those who do not have enough money to please their landlord, are forced to join. This has a direct bearing on the efficiency of the soldier.

3. State of training and discipline

I have had a few opportunities of seeing the men of KUSUNG and TRAPCHI Regiments on parade in LHASA. The standard of drill, with and without arms, is very poor. I have no hesitation in saying that an I.A. [Indian Army] recruit, after two weeks training, is much smarter than the soldiers of the Tibetan Body Guard Regiment. The Tibetan soldier shows no pride in being a soldier. The standard of turn out and discipline is shocking. The soldier does not seem to wash himself and his clothes. A great freedom of choice is given especially to senior officers, in the selection of their uniforms. As the soldier is not given any pay, he has to resort to objectionable methods to earn enough money to support himself and his family. He has no hesitation in looting the civilians in the villages through which he happens to pass. Rape is common and obviously allowed by the officers. There are no training units or schools. The new soldier is expected to pick up professional knowledge from the older men in his Regiment. N.C.O.s [Non-Commissioned Officers] who have been trained by I.A. instructors at Gyantse have proved quite useful in training other men of their Regiment. But their knowledge now seems to be quite rusty as no refresher courses have been run for these men. The I.A. instructors found these men quite keen and enthusiastic students. Due to the shortage of ammunition and a desire of the Tibetan Government to build up an ammunition reserve, the soldier was seldom

given an opportunity to fire his weapons in the past. The little ammunition which was received from India was locked up in the ammunition dump in LHASA. Recently fire practices were held in LHASA and were considered quite useful by the army officers.

4. Leadership

The Magchies (Cs-in-C) and Depons (Battalion Commanders) are mere figure heads who are usually despised by their men. Any civil official may be picked up and made Magchi or Depon. These officers after being trained to salute with their swords are considered quite fit for their respective commands. The real leaders are the Rupons (Majors who have rise from the ranks) and the N.C.Os. These are the persons who train and lead their men in action. Although junior in rank, they command respect of their men.

5. Pay and rations

The following are the yearly rates of pay:

Mago (Sepoy)	-----	18 sangs (Rs 3/-)
Depon(Bn.Comd)	-----	900 sangs (Rs.180/-)
Magchi (C-in-C.)	-----	1800 sangs (Rs.360/-)

Free rations are provided to the soldier by the Government. Uniform is provided by the landlord who enlists the man.

6. Medical organizations

Apart from a few civilian vaccinators who are sent round with vaccine in the event of a break out of smallpox in the army, there is no medical organization. Neither are there any civil hospitals. The Indian Government runs hospitals at Lhasa, Gyantse and Yatung.

The most common disease in the army as well as the civil population is V.D. Majority of the patients who come for treatment to our hospitals suffers from

this deadly disease. The common habit of the soldiers to rape any woman he can get hold of, the easy ways of the Tibetan women and the prevalence of polyandry in the country, contribute largely to the widespread V.D. Even nuns and monks from the monasteries have come to these hospitals for treatment of V.D. [venereal disease]. Other common diseases are bad teeth, goiter and colds. The soldier is strong and very tough.

7. Morale

Because of the meager pay, complete absence of amenities and a lack of interest of officers in his welfare, it is not surprising that the moral of the Tibetan soldier is low. Another factor which I am sure contributes to this, is lack of confidence in his weapons which is due to inadequate training.

8. Inter-Communication

There is no scientific system of intercommunication used in the army. Some Helios and flags are used to transmit only a set number of messages. No other messages can be transmitted by this means. The international signal code is not used by the Tibetan army. Intercommunication is by means of runners who may be mounted if the distance is long and horses are available in the nearby villages.

The Tibetan Government has got wireless stations at CHAMDO and NAGCHUKA linked to LHASA. The sets used are American which were given as a gift by the American Government. Mr. Fox, an ex-wireless operator of the Indian Mission in LHASA, is the wireless expert of the Tibetan Government. He is now training 12 Tibetan boys to operate these sets. So far he has found these boys dull and slow. It is doubtful whether they will ever learn this trade. There is a telegram line up to LHASA. Upto GYANTSE, it is worked by Indian P & T Deptt. From GYANTSE to LHASA, the Tibet Government work it.

9. CHAMDO Wireless station

This wireless station which was opened recently is in a good working condition. Speech is possible between LHASA and CHAMDO. Mr. Ford an ex-R.A.F. wireless operator is in charge of this station.

10. Landing grounds

There are no landing grounds anywhere in Tibet. Suitable sites are available at TSONA, GYANTSE and LHASA. Also strong wind storm blow over TSONA daily in the afternoons. The ground is fairly level at all the three places and I think landing grounds can be made with very little work.

11. Foreign officers and arms

Not a single foreign officer is employed in the Tibetan Army. Except for a few weapons given by CHIANG-KAI SHEK, all other weapons have been obtained from India.

12. Communists

There are absolutely no communists in Tibet.

13. Militia

The Militia merely consists of men who are earmarked by landlords for the army in case of emergency. No training is given to these men. Neither are they issued with any uniforms or weapons. The exact number of men in the Militia is not known.

The Tibetan Government is now considering to raise a special Militia of 2500 men from well-to-do families in LHASA.

Young monks can also be called up in emergency. 1/3rd of the total male population are monks. These monks are believed to be due to the fact

that they have no worldly attachments. The monks of SERA monastery have fought well against the Chinese in the past.

GENERAL STAFF BRANCH

(M.T. Directorate)

Reference your Note dated 26th of June 1949 above, the delay in replying to which has been on account of the necessity of ascertaining certain facts.

One of the tasks of this Directorate is to collect information regarding foreign countries – these bordering India in particular – with special reference to their armed forces and to military topography.

In view of the fact that the 4th Mahrattas stationed at Lebong (Darjeeling) have a Company on detachment in Gyantse in Tibet, we wrote to Eastern Command suggesting that the detachment would be an excellent source of information in respect of Tibet and asked Eastern Command to forward us a paper giving as much military and topographical information on Tibet as they could acquire. Accordingly, on the 1st of June, Eastern Command detailed Lt. Prem Govil to proceed to Gyantse to obtain the information we required. On his arrival at Gangtok on the 12th of June he learnt that the Political Officer at Gangtok was to proceed on tour to Lhasa and Shigatse at the end of June and suggested that he should be given permission by Eastern Command to proceed with the Political Officer's party. On 16th of June Eastern Command asked Lt. Govil whether the Political Officer was agreeable to the proposal. In his reply dated 28 June Lt. Govil informed Eastern Command that the Political Officer was agreeable to his proceeding to Lhasa and Shigatse provided an approach was made through the proper channels.

It will be noted that Lt. Govil made no attempt to proceed beyond Gyantse (where an Indian Military Unit is stationed) without first seeking the

approval of both the Political Officer at Gangtok and Eastern Command Headquarters,

As the Joint Secretary External Affairs' note above indicates that his Ministry does not approve of Lt. Govil's proposal to proceed with the Political Officer's Party, Eastern Command are being informed accordingly.

Brigadier
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Jul 49.

Ministry of Defence
(B.B. Ghosh Esqr)