

## **Advances in the Lohit Sector**

### *A promising trade route*

We have briefly mentioned the tours of the Assistant Political Officers<sup>1</sup> posted in Sadiya in the Walong<sup>2</sup> region at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These tours occurred mostly before the border between India and Tibet was fixed during the Simla Convention in 1914.

During the following decades, this sector like the Siang and Subansiri valleys were not a priority for the administrators in Shillong and Delhi.

However at the end of the 1930's, the interest resurfaced.

In his yearly report for 1936-37, W. H. Galvert, the Political Officer, Sadiya Frontier Track mentioned that he "carried out a tour in the Mishmi Hills so far as the Dou [Du] Valley (Unadministered). The object was to renew contact with the Taroan and Miju Mishmis who had not been visited for fifteen years, to inspect the suspension bridges over the Delei and Dou Rivers and to investigate the possibility of re-opening the Lohit Valley Road beyond Theroliang."

This shows that at the end of the 1930's, these remote areas were still 'un-administrated'.

The tours of British officers would however intensify during the following years; they could not be called 'promenades' anymore.

### **The Rima Road**

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<sup>1</sup> Such as W. G. M. Dundas, T. P. M. O'Callaghan or Noel Williamson.

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia thus describes today's Walong: "a small cantonment and administrative town in the Anjaw District of the State of Arunachal Pradesh. Walong is also the easternmost town in India. Anjaw was carved out of Lohit District in 2004. Walong's approximate position is 28° 06' North, 97° East. It lies on the west bank of the Lohit River (a tributary of the Brahmaputra), approximately 20 [it is more 40] kilometres south of the Chinese border.

The issue of the Rima road was reopened<sup>3</sup> in 1937 by a letter from the Governor of Assam to the Government of India to recommend that the Lohit Valley road up to the international boundary, south of Rima should be reopened. It was the only way to improve "the nature and quality of our system of intelligence on the North-East Frontier". The Governor believes:

The advantages likely to accrue from the reopening of the road are great. His Excellency is advised that were a road passable for ponies to be maintained as far as the International Boundary, the Tibetan Government would undoubtedly keep the road between Rima and the Boundary open. By this means the great wool-producing areas of Eastern Tibet would be tapped and the trade from them brought down to Sadiya and thence to the Assam-Bengal Railway or the Brahmaputra steamer service. With the Assam end of the road emerging in the tea-growing districts there will be every inducement for planters to produce leaf and brick tea suitable to Tibetan taste, and a valuable return trade could be expected to develop. It would not indeed be unduly optimistic to anticipate that the road might well become one of the greatest trade routes across the Indian Frontier, and with the trade a constant stream of information can be expected to reach us.

But that was not all; the Governor affirms that there are other important reasons to go ahead with the project: "[the] result of the reopening of the road would be a tightening of our hold on the tribes through which it passes; with increased opportunities for the gradual suppression of slavery to which the Government of India is committed."

Unfortunately the project was dropped by the Government of India which then saw: "little probability that any material advantages were to be

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<sup>3</sup> It was already discussed at the end of the Mishmi Mission (1912) and the Walong Promenade (1914).

expected either from the commercial or strategical point of view in case the road were reopened up to Rima.”

After his visit to the area in 1940, R.W. Godfrey, the Political Officer of Sadiya Frontier Tracks makes the following remarks in his annual report:

For the first time in twenty-six years a visit was paid by the Political Officer to Rima. I spent a week at Rima in January and established friendly relations with local officials and residents. I was received with great hospitality. Both the people at Rima and also traders from Kham and the country bordering on China are all very anxious that we complete the mule track as far as Rima. They point out that a great deal of the trade now diverted to Sikkim would come straight down the Lohit to Sadiya, a journey eight times shorter and far more safe.

This did not help the project to progress. Nothing happened on the road front during the following months and years, though the exchanges between the British and Tibetan officials continued during the following seasons.

### **The advances in the 1940's**

As mentioned, it is only at the beginning of the 1940's that the Government of India started showing an interest in this truly remote area again.

At the same time, some departments of the Nationalist government in Chongqing were also concerned about the situation in Tibet; they thought it was important to begin to look into the issues related to 'China's boundaries', though other departments such as the Foreign Ministry believed that it was better not to antagonize the British during wartime.

Hsiao-Ting Lin, in his *Tibet and Nationalist China's Frontier*<sup>4</sup> asserts:

The MTAC<sup>5</sup> policy planners considered that it would be of great advantage to reinforce Chinese authority in the southwest with a

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<sup>4</sup> Hsiao-ting Lin, *Tibet and Nationalist China's Frontier: Intrigues and Ethnopolitics, 1928-49* (University of British Columbia, 2006)

display of troops there. However, the Waijiaobu<sup>6</sup> officials resolutely refused to accept such an idea, arguing that this would make the British unnecessarily suspicious, and would hinder cooperation between the two countries in the postwar international arena.

The British Government had a similar attitude during the War, not doing anything which would irritate the Chinese.

It is only in 1943, that a larger British expedition was sent from Sadiya to explore the Lohit and adjacent valleys and have again a direct contact with the Tibetan officials on the other side of the McMahon Line.

We have the comprehensive *Tour Diary*<sup>7</sup> of F.P. Mainprice<sup>8</sup>, an ICS officer posted as Assistant Political Officer for the Lohit Valley which narrates the day to day issues in the life of an officer on a strategic border.

It was decided that Mainprice would tour these areas and find out about the presence of Chinese in the region and the possibility to open a road to Tibet. Mainprice and his companions started their journey in the first day of December 1943; soon after, they began encountering groups of Tibetan traders riding down to Sadiya. On December 5, the APO writes in his diary:

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<sup>5</sup> The Mongolian and Tibetan Affairs Commission.

<sup>6</sup> The Chinese Ministry of External Affairs.

<sup>7</sup> The original documents of the British Archives have been obtained from IDC Publishers – Internal affairs and boundaries, 1912-1947 (Indo-Tibetan frontier: Lohit valley) — original file number: L/P&S/12/4214; Pol Ext Coll 36 File 42.

*Tour diary of Mr F.P. Mainprice, ICS, Assistant Political Officer, Lohit Valley, November 1943 to May 1945*, (Shillong: Assam Government Press, 1945).

<sup>8</sup> Frederick Paul Mainprice, I.C.S., Joined Service 1937 and posted to Central Provinces as Assistant Commissioner. Appointed to I.P.S. in April 1942 serving in Eastern States Agency; British trade agent, Gyantse, October 1942. After his appointment as Assistant Political Officer in Lohit Valley, was transferred as Assistant Political Agent, Gilgit until August 1947. After Indian independence worked for the Government of Pakistan in Karachi, 1948-49, specializing on the Kashmir problem. Was expelled from Kashmir by the Government of India in 1948.

“Thenceforward the path was not difficult. We passed two more groups of Tibetans, one from Ponton, just above Rima, with a man who had been 17 times in India before, who said the Chinese were very far away from Rima, when I questioned him of that point.”

At Hayuliang, the confluence of the Delai and Lohit rivers, they heard from a Mishmi that a couple of days earlier a party of Chinese had camped nearby at Kaseliang; the APO was told that the Chinese were approaching Hayuliang. Mainprice recounts: “They turned out to be party of four, wearing Tibetan clothes, with a Tibetan servant and 10 Tibetan coolies and under the leadership of Chang Tze Chen, and were ostensibly surveying the road from Kunming<sup>9</sup> and Atuntze through Rima to Sadiya under the auspices of the new Sino-Indian Transportation Branch of the Chinese Ministry of Communications”.

They told the APO that they had no maps of the country that they were traversing. Mainprice did not believe them. He comments: “K.M. Khang, who had been 12 years in Lhasa and some years in India, seemed the brain of the party, and was most reticent. We gave them some much appreciated tea and had a very friendly conversation before they went on. They had no tent, slept out, and lived on the country.”

Apparently, Khang admitted that he had met Tondup, a Tibetan army officer at Rima; he had met him before at Lhasa.” This obviously meant that he had widely traveled in Tibet.

Hsiao-Ting Lin, in his *Tibet and Nationalist China's Frontier*, provides some interesting background:

The Nationalist government's clandestine survey activities were in accordance with statements made by Shen Zonglian<sup>10</sup>, the newly appointed Chinese representative to Tibet: he expressed ‘the

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<sup>9</sup> In Yunnan.

<sup>10</sup> Also spelt Shen Tsung-Lien.

desirability of fixing an eastern boundary for Tibet and of opening a motor road between India and China via Tibet'. Although Shen apparently put forward his road project in the interest of Sino-Indian communications, both the British and Tibetans were convinced that the opening of previously proposed communications with Tibet from the Chinese side would promote opportunities for Chinese economic and political penetration in that area.

As we saw earlier, there was a tremendous increase in the intelligence activities of the Chinese after Shen's arrival in Lhasa; it was therefore not only a question of promoting trade. Hsiao-Ting continues:

The reopening of overland communications, after two years and eight months of Japanese blockade, between China (Kunming) and India (Lédo) via Burma (Myithyina) in early 1945 received tremendous publicity and provided a strong stimulus to Chinese public morale. Chinese sources suggest that, instead of utilizing the proposed China-India roadway for wartime material supplies, the KMT regime was now considering this route to be of strategic significance in consolidating its state control in southwest China. Moreover, having the completed survey for the road via Tibet, the Nationalists sought to strengthen their bargaining position vis-à-vis an unpredictable Sino-Tibetan relationship in the postwar era. Nevertheless, at no time before the collapse of its rule in 1949 did the Nationalist government have an opportunity to begin the road through the Tibetan-controlled territories. In the late 1950s, it was Chiang Kai-shek's long-term adversary, the Chinese Communist Party, that eventually realized the long-awaited Sino-Tibetan roadway project.

One of the main worries of Mainprice's bosses in Shillong was how deep was the Chinese penetration in the area?

On his way, Mainprice visited the Delai river valley. He went to a point called Choglagam<sup>11</sup> and in his report to his superiors, he reminded them that W.C.M. Dundas, the Political Officer of the Mishmi Mission had written a letter to the Chief Commissioner of Assam on May 1, 1912: "On this report the construction of a track up the Delai River to the Glai pass<sup>12</sup> was, amongst other measures for the control of the North-East frontier, sanctioned in the Foreign Department letter... the position is certainly a good one, with a cluster of ten village within a radius of about a mile around it..." Thirty-one years later, no progress had been made on the project.

The small expedition started its last march towards Rima on February 2, 1944. We shall go into some detail of the encounter between the APO and the Tibetan officials as they show the state of the relations between the British and Tibetan officials at the end of World War II. Mainprice recounts:

After passing through Sangu village we reached the rafting place at 9:15 [am]. Some men of Sangu and Samar [villages in Tibet] had collected a few old logs of some light wood (they said the pines, the only wood growing nearby, were useless for building a raft), and these they tied into a ramshackle raft, which could take about three men and a steersman over at a time, each trip taking half an hour. Accordingly I sent all the Mishmi and Maiyi coolies with a few riflemen off to the rope bridge 4.5 miles further up".

Soon after he crossed over into Tibetan territory, Mainprice was received by the Tibetan officials. As always in Tibet, the post of Dzungpon or district magistrate is a dual post held by a lay person and a cleric. The APO continues his narration:

Soon after I myself crossed, 'Pula', the Shango of Zayul (roughly equivalent to Tahsildar), Dotung, Zayul Tsachu or excise officer, and

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<sup>11</sup> Today a taluk of Anjaw's district.

<sup>12</sup> Leading to Tibet.

various servants of both Dzungpons rode up and greeted us, presenting muslin scarves<sup>13</sup>, and spreading a carpet, entertained us with spirit made from koden and rice, while they sent a man to announce our arrival on the Rima side.

Rima was the first large Tibetan village on the other side of the McMahon Line though the headquarters of the Tibetan officials was located nearby at Shikathang. The APO then describes the officials who receive him:

Both are Lhasa men, 'Pula' a fat man of about 38 who has been Shango for 15 years, succeeding his father, and Dotung a more travelled man with a smattering of Hindustani and even a few words of English. After an hour of cordial conversation through the interpreter Heshe, who knows Hindustani but not English, we rode across the fields past the small village of Rima to Shikathang, a small collection of buildings where the officials live in the cold weather and collect the produce of Zayul<sup>14</sup>, with a Buddhist temple, situated on the top of a high bank, where two or three hundred people were collected to watch our arrival.

Rima, a border town (or big village) was the trading hub of the entire region. The report continues:

Traders going down to India often leave their pack animals to graze on the Rima plain till their return, but there did not seem to be a very great number as we rode through it. More than half the fields were fallow, though they seemed good if rather stony land, and this potentially fruitful plain was largely covered with scrub and neglected the very heavy demands made by the officials on the labour and produce of nearby inhabitants no doubt being the cause.

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<sup>13</sup> Tibetan khatas or ceremonial scarves.

<sup>14</sup> The Zayul country is located north of the McMahon Line opposite the Lohit Valley.

As Mainprice's Mishmis coolies arrive in the camp, the APO is taken to meet Khendrap Ngudup, the ecclesiastic Dzongpon, known as Tsedrung and the Khangsar Dzong, a monk representative from Drepung. The second Dzongpon, Khonto Dzong Deshyimpa is a lay person, but is absent at the time of the APO's visit. Mainprice thus describes the officials:

The Khangsar Dzong, a Lhasa man from Drepung monastery, about 45 years old, who like the Shango has never been outside Tibet, entertained us to tea, walnuts and spirit, was very friendly and seemed quite at his ease after a short time. He went to the English School at Gyantse, where he did not get much further than his A B C, was a telephone clerk in the Chumbi valley for some time, and then knew Hindustani well, though he has now forgotten it, then had 4 years in Lhasa before being appointed Dzongpon of Teya, 5 days east of Chamdo. He was there 5 years, and has now been 5 years at Sangacho Dzong, and hopes to retire from service this year on the proceeds, which the interpreter estimates at about 25,000 Tibetan rupees a year.

Amusingly, he does not want to be photographed with his wife. One can understand as he was probably a monk. Even amongst lay officials, the practice to have a 'temporary' wife in remote postings is widespread.

Mainprice says:

He has long had a woman living with him, and has three children, but insisted on being photographed alone when I suggested a family group. Lhasa do not apparently know of his wife and family, and he does not want them to before he retires, as the consequences would be very serious for him. He complained that they were very out of things in Zayul and asked how the war was going and was pleased when he heard of our recent successes. A messenger riding as fast as

he can reach Lhasa from Rima in about 10 days, but ordinary communications are much slower.

The next day the party remained in Rima. One official reception followed another, especially after the British had offered gifts to their Tibetan colleagues (a watch, torch and spare batteries, razor and blades, spoons, towel, soap and a mirror and comb for his wife). The food was excellent and varied, "various small dishes of meat and vegetables on a foundation of macaroni, which the Tibetans ate with chopsticks and we with spoons" and as usual in Tibet, the meal is followed by more spirit and more chang beer. The Tibetan officials were delighted to see photos of India, particularly the family of Raja Dorji, the Bhutan representative at Kalimpong.

The APO however takes the opportunity to look around and study the activities in the area. He continues his description:

The Zayul rice is taken north to pay for salt and tea, both from western China, and most of their silver and brassware, carpets, fruits, vegetables, animals, and meat come from Chamdo or considerably further up, the local people being considered very primitive, as indeed they are. The prices of mules and ponies have risen very greatly; the latter greatly predominate locally, but nearly all come from further up.

Then Mainprice describes the other Tibetan officials officiating in this remote district of Tibet:

The Dzungpon takes snuff continually, but neither drinks nor smokes. The other two do both, the Tsachu being well provided, as he takes two packets out of every box of 50 packets passing through, which means 80 packets out of each coolie load of cigarettes. He takes his share of all produce brought down by all parties going to Sadiya as well as from them on their return, and with the great increase in traffic this year must be doing well. Many parties take down only Tibetan silver coin, of which he is said not to take anything, though they have

to pay to cross the rope bridge. The interpreter thinks the Tsachu must make about 15000 Tibetan rupees a year nowadays, and the Shango about 5,000, as the latter has to work under the Dzungpon and give them most of what he collects in revenue from the villages, while the Tsachu is dealing with wealthy traders and has to give much less to the Dzungpon. He thinks the revenue of Zayul, which the two Dzungpon dispatch in cash to Chamdo, might be about 8,000 Tibetan rupees, and that certainly three-quarters of what is collected remains in the official's pockets.

The meal lasted four hours, and then they got another invitation for another feast in the evening (tea and rice with about 20 dishes of meat, turnips, potatoes, onions, lentils, chillies, ladies fingers, ...and other unidentified ingredients, and some excellent wheat bread and tsamba<sup>15</sup>).

The conversation remained cordial. The British Sub-Assistant Surgeon had treated the Dzungpon's wife who had a polypus in the nose, and also the Shango's wife. They were undoubtedly grateful to modern science and the British Empire for helping them in such a way.

The next day<sup>16</sup>, the party continued feasting in Rima. In the morning, they got new gifts, this time of rice, walnuts, eggs, spirit, and some pork. This time it was on behalf of the 'missing' Dzungpon; of course, 'suitable presents' were returned.

Then came the real business. At the end of the meal, the Dzungpon asked Mainprice "what was the trouble about the four villages of Walong, Tinai, Dong and Kahao."

The APO not only was expecting the question, but it was one of the objectives of his visit to get through the British position on the border. He tells his interlocutor: "under the 1914 agreement between the Governments

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<sup>15</sup> Tsampa, or barley flour.

<sup>16</sup> February 4, 1943

of India and Tibet they were ours [the four villages]". He also explains to the Dzungpon where the border is. The latter then asks why no one had ever said so before, 'although several sahibs had visited Rima', and that he has personally no knowledge of the matter; nor has the Shango, who has been here 15 years; the APO answers: "since 1914 no Sadiya officer had met the Dzungpon to tell him, and that the only Government officer who had been to Rima, Mr. Godfrey in 1940, had not been able to meet the Dzungpon."

The Tibetan official then brings up the issue of the boundary stone installed by the Chinese at Menilkrai in 1910. The APO has to explain that "the Chinese inscription was purely ex parte, and that two years after the Chinese had been driven out, the two parties concerned with the boundary, India and Tibet, had agreed amicably on their frontier, unlike China, which was still encroaching; I also emphasized the friendship between Britain, India and Tibet and the advantages of a fixed and agreed boundary."

He even shows the Dzungpon, a map of Rima region with the 'McMahon line frontier printed in black'.

The Tibetan official argues that he had "no intimation of a change in the boundary had ever come from Chamdo or Lhasa, that the four villages had paid revenue to Rima at the same rates as to-day from time immemorial, without any objection from Sadiya, and that we should not have built the post walls at Walong<sup>17</sup>."

When the Dzungpon says that his superiors would be very annoyed if he allows the British to carry on work at Walong, Mainprice reiterates that Walong belongs to India under the 1914 Convention, and he is fully entitled to construct a post there. The APO then requests his Tibetan colleague to check the correct position with Lhasa, adding: "We had no designs on Zayul, and only wished to act in strict conformity with the conventions between our

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<sup>17</sup> The British were building a permanent post in Walong.

Governments. Under the 1914 Convention the four small villages keeping Miju cattle were ours, Samar, Tang and all above were theirs [Tibetan]."

The APO concludes: "We, for our part would confine our activities to our side of the frontier, where we hoped to improve the roads, encourage trade and agriculture, and increase medical services, all of which would be of as much benefit to Tibetans as to our people, and which should greatly increase the Rima revenues in time amply compensating them for the paltry Rs.140 worth of produce they get."

Finally, like in the Siang sector, it is decided that both officials will refer the issue to the respective governments:

We were all subordinate officers of Government and only our Governments could alter the boundary agreed upon 30 years ago. We were going back shortly and were not constructing any buildings inside the stone walls this season, and I suggested they on their part should not take any revenue from the four villages till they heard from Lhasa.

At the end of the conversation, the Dzonpon is emotional; he regrets the unpleasantness of the situation "when our Governments were such friends and the Dzonpon and I [Mainprice] were like brothers".

It would however take three or four months to hear from Lhasa, asserts the Dzonpon, the APO on his part also says that he will report to his government about Dzonpon's friendliness and what he has said.

Mainprice comments:

During it the Dzonpon had fingered his rosary nervously and frequently consulted the Shango and Tsachu, while they had all seemed surprised and pained at this trouble, and above all apprehensive at the thought of the anger of their superiors. The Dzonpon himself is nervous that any trouble will affect his approaching retirement, now that he is so near the end of his term in Zayul.

In his report, the APO admits that his strong statement to the Dzungpon about the British rights "under the 1914 Convention was very necessary, as our case in the upper Lohit Valley has been neglected and gone by default for the last 30 years, and any failure to state it now, even though we may not be able to make the McMahon line frontier here fully effective or stop revenue payments to Rima for another year or two would have greatly strengthened the already forceful case the Dzungpon made out for the status quo."

Mainprice drops a few hints "that they may be passed on eventually to the Dzungpon", to make the Tibetans think twice before doing anything to the post being built in Walong.

The British points out that the location of the post in Walong was good, because, if something had been done at Menilkrai, it would have immediately been construed "as an admission of the Menilkrai boundary claimed by China formerly, and now by Tibet" being the correct border. In any case, "the inclinations of the [population of the] four villages are all on our side", thought the APO.

Thereafter the series of meals could continue. This time, the Shango is the host. The Tibetans try again to broach the frontier issue, but the APO felt that "there was nothing to be gained by adding to our exhaustive discussions in the afternoon."

The next day, they head towards the border again. Before they depart, the Dzungpon's servants bring presents again, a bag of rice, walnuts, and sine dried fruit rather like small plums but with 4 or 5 stones which are said to be common in China.

In return, they got some tea and tobacco from the British. An amusing incident, the Dzungpon makes a fuss to get in writing the names of the British officers and their designation; when in turn, the Tibetans are asked to

write their name in the APO's notebook, the host, the Tsachu does not know how to write.

The British party also discovers that Dzungpon possesses several arms particularly some Japanese rifles stamped 'Republica Mexica 1913', a Mauser pistol of the last war and other weapons with Czech, German, Russian and Chinese markings, The latter are kept in the official's quarters. The Dzungpon mentions some American transport planes which, a few days earlier flew over Rima on their way to China. He thought that it was on a joyride to see the country; he has no idea that these planes took supplies to China as part of the Allies' war efforts. The Tibetan official is most interested when Mainprice told him about the aerial supply route.

They finally part most cordially, with the APO expressing the hope that some of them would visit Sadiya or that they might meet again at Gyantse.

While at Rima, the British interpreter speaks with two Chinese traders (one from Sichuan and one from Yunnan); they are staying in the border village during the season, while their men have gone down to Sadiya to barter Indian goods. There was a third Chinese trader who also lives at Rima; he is dealing in cigarettes and cloth. The APO is thus informed that 2,000 Chinese Muslim troops from Xining in Qinghai province under a warlord<sup>18</sup>, independent of the Central Government has massed; they face the Tibetan troops across a river at Jyekundo. They want the permission to enter into Tibet, which the Tibetans has refused; when ask to confirm this information, the Rima officials say that they know nothing about Sino-Tibetan border affairs, the border is too far away!

The day after he has left the Tibetan territory, the APO comments:

I was quite glad to be away from Rima. The very lengthy sessions in the officials' houses had left little time or opportunity to talk to others or to see anything of our surroundings, while it was uncomfortable to

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<sup>18</sup> Probably, General Ma Bufang.

be almost entirely dependent on those officials both for the means of getting back across the river by rope-bridge or raft and for rice for the Mishmis.

The PIO returns to Sadiya via Walong and later continues his annual tour of the area.

### **Another tour of the Valley**

In his Tour Diary, Major G.T. Allen<sup>19</sup>, APO, Lohit Valley Sub-Agency recounts his visit of the Lohit and nearby valley between March and December 1946. Though Major Allen reached the Tibetan border in Kahao on August 30, 1946, he did not go to Rima like his predecessors. He writes:

Another beautiful day. After crossing two flats, the track follows the river gorge where the cliffs are extremely steep. Then follows about two miles of really terrible going, where one clings to rocks and slides down old badly tied poles, literally overhanging the main river. This portion is really bad. It is not kept up by Government. Finally reached Kahoa (2 houses - 3 pairs bullocks all Mishmi owned). The village has a water channel running through it, and is also about 50 feet from Kahao Chu (steam). They have large area of fields both wet and dry cultivation, and could support larger population. A good deal of land is uncultivated. Sub-assistant Surgeon found 7 Malaria cases -  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the population) and when I went to the village in the dusk it was covered with swarms of mosquitoes. They are very bad indeed here, probably due to the rice fields so close.

The famous border town comprises of 2 houses and 6 bullocks. For Major Allen, there is no question of meeting the Tibetan Dzungpons and other

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<sup>19</sup> IDC Publishers – Internal affairs and boundaries, 1912-1947 (Indo-Tibetan frontier: Lohit valley) — File number: L/P&S/12/4214; Pol Ext Coll 36 File 42.

*Tour diary of Major G.T. Allen*, MC, Assistant Political Officer, Lohit Valley Sub-Agency, for March to December 1946, (Shillong: Assam Govt Press, Jul 1947).

officials in Rima, though these regular tours help to progressively establish that these remote areas are part of the Indian territory. Major Allen writes:

Camped on the far side of Kahoa Chu, and self, Subedar Uzir, one NCO, Menonglom and Sengadzup went on the last 3 miles to the Tibetan border. Beyond our camp the flat extends for about a mile and is thickly covered with very fine pines. This whole area shows traces former extensive cultivation with very many stone walls and presumably there was large population here formerly.

Crossed the Di Chu which is almost a river, by a dangerous combination of fallen pine trees with a few fields cultivated by man of Sama [Samar] (Tibet) where, on the West bank the border comes. A small hut there us where Pula's representative comes in winter to collect taxes from those traders going down to Sadiya. On the East bank (on which we were) the border follows the river up for about a mile, and we proceeded along a wide *maidan* [field] finally up to a small ravine, where there is a spring nearly. This marks the border on the East side.

The tax collection seems to have stopped and the 'Pula' only comes to the border to collect custom duties, which is different from the usual compulsory taxes earlier collected. Before leaving back for Walong, the APO remarks:

Rima is about 6 miles on from here. On the far bank West the valley opens out into a long series of maidans much wider and larger than anything we have on our side, with the Tibetan villages of Sama and Sangu with about 30-15 houses.

But the story is not finished.

### **China complains about the British advances**

It is worth mentioning an interesting development.

In 1946, a Note from the Foreign Affair Department discussed a complaint from the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs who protested against British

intrusions in the Walong Sector, the easternmost part of the India-Tibet border.

Tellingly, the Chinese never complained about the Tawang area, they objected only to the area around Walong in the eastern part of NEFA.

According to the British Note August 21, 1946<sup>20</sup>:

The Chinese have made representations to the British Embassy at Nanking regarding the Government of India's action in the McMahon Line area. Not all the names are identifiable – Sir Ralph Stevenson is making enquires about them – but the note appears to relate solely to the Lohit area. Probably the Chinese are basing themselves on the customary frontier between China and India prior to the 1914 Convention which ran through Menilkrai, south of Walong.

There appear to be two courses open to us:

1. To deny that the Chinese have any right to concern themselves about what goes on the Indo-Tibetan frontier
2. To point to the agreed frontier in the 1914 Convention.

There is not perhaps a very great difference between these two courses, as both would involve reference to the 1914 Convention; but before writing to the Foreign Office it would be preferable to have the Government of India's views.

The Foreign Office sought Delhi's view because after the visit of the Cabinet Mission to India in May 1946, a plan had been formulated for the transfer of power from the British Raj to the Indian leadership, providing India with independence under dominion status in the Commonwealth of Nations.

Lord Pethick-Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India, Sir Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade, and A. V. Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty had proposed to set up a Constituent Assembly and an Interim Council with support of the main Indian parties.

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<sup>20</sup> British Archives, also File number: L/P&S/12/4214; Pol Ext Coll 36 File 42.

The Interim Government of India, formed on 2 September 1946 was to help a smooth transition to independence.

To come back to Walong, London sent another note to the Government of India to explain the situation:

This complaint by the Chinese is presumably connected with the complaint which the Tibetans made last year about our operations south of the McMahon Line, (which is the international frontier between India and Tibet).

In all probability, this refers to the British 'advances' in Lohit, particularly the visit of Mainprice to Rima in 1944. As we saw, it was not a military operation, but a routine 'promenade' of the Political Officer in the Walong/Lohit sector.

The Chinese complaint may also be linked with the proposed Chinese road in the area. Hsiao-Ting mentioned: "The only substantial achievement of the 1944 Tibetan affairs meeting was the setting up of a Yunnan-Xikang Border Commission in the northern Yunnan border city of Deqin<sup>21</sup> (Atuntze) in the summer of 1945. According to the 1944 conference, the purpose of this organ was to enhance Nationalist control over Tibet and the adjacent peripheral regions. Yet even on the eve of its inauguration, senior officials of the Nationalist government failed to reach a consensus as to whether Chinese military forces or frontier police should be attached to this commission".

But let us return to the British note, it continues:

At some stage since the 1914 Convention [China] created two new provinces - Chinghai [Qinghai] and Sikang [Xikang], bordering on what they conceive to be the Sino-Tibetan Frontier. According to the 1914 Convention, however, these so called provinces incorporate large tracts of territory belonging to Tibet. What is worse from our point of

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<sup>21</sup> Also written, Dechen.

view is that they also incorporate most of the Assam Tribal Areas, [and] part of Northern Burma. The Chinese have recently taken to printing maps showing the boundaries taken to printing maps showing the boundaries claimed by them and I attach a copy of such a map with the frontiers accepted by H.M.G. superimposed upon it. The lines claimed by the Chinese are marked in red and the relevant boundaries of Tibet according to the 1914 Convention are shown in blue and green. (The green line is the same as that marked in red in the map appended to the 1914 Convention, and is consequently sometimes referred to as the 'red line', or alternatively the 'McMahon Line'). This map explains the reference in the second paragraph of the Chinese M.F.A.'s<sup>22</sup> note to 'acts of aggression on Chinese territorial sovereignty'.

The irredentism of the Chinese position was not new and Beijing still today wants to grab portions of Indian territory, in Arunachal Pradesh and Ladakh.<sup>23</sup> The telegram to Delhi says:

In view of our undertaking to uphold Tibetan autonomy, to say nothing of our non-recognition of the boundaries of Sikang, I do not think that we should engage in any argument with the Chinese over the exact location of India's Northern Frontier, and of our right to assert our authority up to it. I would suggest that our reply to the Chinese should

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<sup>22</sup> The Ministry of External Affairs

<sup>23</sup> Beijing still insists that Tawang district is part of the People's Republic of China. But, it is clearly an after-thought. In January 2012, Special Representative and State Councilor Dai Bingguo told his Indian counterpart, Shivshankar Menon during the 15th Meeting of the Special Representatives that India should first discuss the Eastern Sector of the boundary. Dai further asked Menon how much territory New Delhi would be ready to part with. Apart from the fact that historically this does not make sense, why did the Chinese not follow the Dalai Lama and his entourage into this area in 1959, if they really believed that it was a part of Chinese territory?

be that the North-Eastern Frontier of India and the Eastern Frontier of Tibet are defined in the 1914 Convention, and that we have already explained the nature of our operations to the Tibetan Government.

D.M. Cleary, the official of the India Office dealing with the issue, proposed to inform the Government of India accordingly after getting the concurrence of the British Foreign Office.

E. P. Donaldson of the Foreign Office insisted that these types of issues should gradually be passed on to the Interim Government for their advice, if not decision.

It occurs to me that in the early stages at least, this is a matter which the Government of India should be allowed or even encouraged to handle themselves through the representative whom they will shortly be appointing to Nanking to take the place of their Agent-General there rather than that correspondence with the Chinese Government should be handled by H.M. Embassy.

Donaldson also notes:

The Chinese note is a protest, based on wholly unsupported assertions against alleged acts of aggression said to have been committed by Military Officers acting under orders of the Government of India against 'Chinese territorial sovereignty'.

Donaldson suggested relating the matter to the 'advance' of the British Administration in Tawang area.

Subsequently, London wrote to the Government of India: "as, I assume, you would wish this matter to be dealt with in the first instance in direct correspondence between the Chinese Government and the Government of India."

However, London remained cautious: "If at a later stage, the question arose of the whereabouts of the Indo-Tibetan Frontier, or of the Status of Tibet, as

outlines in the Simla Convention of 1914, were to be called in questions, H.M.G. would necessarily have to take a hand."

On November 14, 1946, Sir R. Stevenson, the British Ambassador to Nanking informed London that the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs enquired "whether London had conferred on Government of India full power to discuss and settle all questions in connection with Tibet outstanding between China and Great Britain". He adds:

We have got to tread rather verily in these matter as, although we are still ostensibly responsible for the foreign relations of India, there can be little doubt, at least as regards relations with limitrophe countries, she will tend to take an increasingly independent line and there is nothing we can do from here than to give advice which the Government of India may or may not follow.

Surprisingly after Independence, the Government of India was more decisive than the British administration. The area was completely reorganized.

### **A 'small' rectification of the border**

It is necessary to mention here a rather amazing story which shows how the mindset of the officers of the Raj is always thinking in strategic terms.

On September 12, 1945, the Political Officer, Sadiya Frontier Tract forwards to the Governor of Assam, a note written by Mainprice on the human settlements south of the McMahon Line and a 'small' rectification of the Line.

On August 12, 1945, after one of his visits in the Walong area, Mainprice mentions his idea of rectification to his boss in Sadiya:

...looking further ahead to the time when the Lohit Valley road has been pushed right through to the frontier and all the trade and animal traffic of Eastern Tibet can go right down it to India, I do not consider the valley at Walong, 18 miles south of the frontier, will ever provide sufficient place and sufficiently larger area of cultivation for the

important entrepot and centre for trade and spreading our influence and gathering information in Eastern Tibet which we should have on our side of the frontier, if Lohit Valley is ever to be more than a blind valley.

The APO speaks of the geographical features of the Lohit Valley which is extremely narrow and unfit as a trade hub, in case the commerce with Tibet increases; an eventuality which according to the British officer would benefit both Tibet and India. Mainprice continues:

Nor is there in my opinion a sufficiently large area for these purposes anywhere on our side of the present Line. We could however get the space the extensive cultivation, and the nucleus of the resources we need for this centre if we advanced the frontier about 7 miles further to the north up the west side of the main valley only to a point opposite the farm village of Rima or the Zhayul Tibetan headquarters of Shika taking in the two 7-house villages of Samar and Sangmu, which are inhabited exclusively by Zakring of tribal origin, who also can own several miles on our side of the McMahon Line. These 2 villages, unlike our present 4 Mishmi hamlets, are well provided with livestock (ponies, donkeys, cattle, and pigs) and there is scope for extending their already remarkably large and fine cultivation. The valley opens out there, and there should be no difficulty in making a landing strip below one of these villages, from which planes could circle easily over the Rima plain. At Walong and elsewhere in the narrow valley on our side it is very doubtful if a safe airstrip can be found or made.

Mainprice is thinking in terms of human resources, such as coolies available to carry the goods to be bartered in the plains of Assam, but also food for the travellers and fodder for their animals. The Lohit is just too narrow to supply these essential items.

A look at Google Earth shows how narrow the Lohit Valley is between Kahao, the border village (2 houses) and Walong.

But further north, a few kilometers away between the McMahon Line and Rima, there are a large expanse of land. Mainprice often spoke of maidans during his visit in February 1944.

The suggestion of the APO is to have a deal with the Tibetans and rectify the border.

Mainprice argues:

Strategically this advance of the frontier and of our frontier post would be of the greatest advantage to us from other aspect too. The McMahon Line was fixed north of the Tho Chu and Di Chu to give us the command of (1) the easy summer route into the Lohit Valley by the Tho Chu Pass and down the Dav Valley and (2) the Diphuk La route into Northern Burma by which Captain Kingdon-Ward and two other small parties escaped from the Japanese occupation of Burma in 1942; but from Walong we have no control over either and in any other position further up on our side of the McMahon Line (which could not be established without a considerable increase in the population of our frontier area) it would be very difficult to control more than one of these routes. A post situated near Sangu village would command both these routes (the Diphuk Pass routes works its way across a rockface of tremendous height rising sheer from the Rongma Chu (Tellu or Lohit opposite Sangmu), would have a good ferrying place across to the Rima (eastern) bank just below, and overlooks and commands the whole Rima plain, and the route from the Eastern to Central Tibet running just north of our frontier up the Rongto Chu.

When Mainprice visited these villages a year earlier (and met the local Dzongpon<sup>0</sup>, he had taken detailed notes of the geographical contours of the area and the logistical difficulties to cross the river.

His conclusions are rather radical: let us ask the Tibetans to change the border, as in any case, it is 'insignificant' for them:

The small rectification of the McMahon Line, if comparative insignificance to Zayul and Eastern Tibet, but of vital importance to our whole political, strategic, and commercial position up the Lohit Valley, which provides the only link between (Eastern Tibet and India, would presumably have to wait till the whole question of this Indo-Tibetan frontier, including the rendition of Towang [Tawang], is taken up afresh with the Tibetan Government. But whether we get Samar and Sangu or not, and whether we get them soon or after some years, it is still essential to begin immediately to restore the former population and cultivation of Walong and the now uninhabited 25 miles on our side of the McMahon Line below Samar, and it will be extremely difficult if not impossible for us to carry on even at Walong, let alone nearer the frontier, unless the present orders about settlement from lower Zayul are modified in the sense I have recommend.

The Political Officer in Sadiya recommends the 'small' modification: "I quite agree with the APOs' suggestion. Not only will air supply be much easier, but Zayul plain from Sangmu. I cannot too strongly recommend this. Here again it should be possible for Government of India to come to some agreement with Tibet. This place is the logical point for a frontier post."

Even the Army finds it a good idea. The APO explained his proposal to Brigadier McLeod of Army Headquarters in Delhi who "after flying over the country commended it on strategic grounds."

J.P. Mills, the Adviser to the Governor of Assam for Tribal Areas and States was wiser, he just forwarded the proposal to the Government of India 'for the sake of completeness'. He writes:

The suggestion of the Assistant Political Officer that the McMahon Line should be modified in the neighbourhood of Rima has already been

mentioned to the Government of India ...I cannot recommend [the proposal] of the Assistant Political [Officer] until our line of communication has been improved at least up to bridle path standard throughout, but I mention the matter here for the sake of completeness and in order that it may be borne in mind if it is proposed to modify the Line in favour of Tibet else here.

This would remain at that.

One point is important to remember, the deepest Chinese incursions in the area occurred in 1910 and 1912. The Chinese came, installed border stones in Menilkrai and left after a short time (the markers were removed by O'Callaghan a couple years later and new ones placed at Kahao on the Line). Today, Beijing claims a huge chunk of Arunachal Pradesh, saying that it had always 'belonged' to them and that they had always been in the control of these areas.

Regarding Tawang area, the Chinese never even came close, but is another story.

After Independence, changes were brought about for a better administration of the area. In 1948, Sadiya Frontier Tract was bifurcated; two districts the Abor Hills and the Mishmi Hills districts were created.

On August 13 1952, Tezu became the headquarters of Mishmi Hills District while Hayuliang was upgraded to a sub-division headquarters with an Assistant Political Officer in charge.

In 1954, the Mishmi Hills district was renamed as Lohit Frontier Division. Subsequently, in 1956, Dibang Valley was constituted as a separate sub-division with headquarter at Roing.

In 1965, Lohit Frontier Division became the Lohit District. In 1980, the Dibang Valley with headquarter at Anini was carved out of Lohit District.

Finally, Anjaw District with its headquarter at Hawaii was created in February 2004 with seven administrative units, Hayuliang, Hawaii, Manchal, Goiliang, Walong, Kibithoo, Chaglogam.

This was the conclusion of a tumultuous history.