

To: Historylinks Museum

From: Hamish Johnston

### **Royal Indian Army Service Corps (RIASC) presence in Dornoch and Sutherland**

My interest in the RIASC in Scotland during World War 2 stems from my step-grandfather having been the Commanding Officer (CO) of the RIASC No. 47 Supply Depot Section from 1939, then Second-in-Command of the whole Indian Contingent before combining both jobs until April 1944 when things packed up. From my research I wrote an article for the Highland Family History Society Journal about Force K6/Indian Contingent and the Supply Depot Section. This led to gathering information on RIASC graves in Scotland and, from National Archives copies of extant War Diaries, the activities of the Army Transport companies themselves.

For your records the following provides a summary of RIASC presence in Dornoch and Sutherland collated from the National Archive War Diaries, Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) records and statutory Death Registrations:

#### **At Lairg**

- No.25 Company 11/10/42 until 4/1/43;
- No. 32 Company moved to Lairg from Golspie on 15/9/43, last Diary entry 31/10/43. 14/10/43 - "A party of 20 ORs and 1 NCO left for Dornoch to meet the 4th Indian Div personnel touring the Contingent" 25/10/43 "Seventeen L/Nks (i.e. Lance Naiks, or Corporals) arrived from Reinforcement Unit, Dornoch"
- No 42 Company 8/7/43 until (at least) 28/8/43 (but may have been at Dornoch see below)

#### **At Golspie**

- No. 32 Company 13/10/42 until 4/1/43 and again 5/7/43 until 15/9/43.
- Golspie camp at MR 355225 (Cassini) = 842004 (OS). 6/7/43 visit by garrison engineer, Dornoch. 25/7/43 - "Col Sykes (IC CO) left today for Reinforcement Unit at Dornoch"

#### **At Dornoch**

- The Reinforcement Unit during (and probably beyond) the period July to October 1943.
- No. 42 Company 8/7/43 until (at least) 28/8/43 (but may have been at Lairg) This war diary is ambiguous and sparse. It states (1/7/43)"1st special troops train left for Lairg" and (8/7/43) "Complete unit arrived in Lairg and settling in". However, it also states "Lairg map reference 2810 sheet no; 21 Dornoch". The Cassini map reference translates to 7688, which is not Lairg, but at Lonemore outside Dornoch. The map reference only is occasionally repeated on some of the sheets but there are no other geographical references or place names mentioned in the Diaries during these months. Perhaps the map reference is more likely to be right? I do not suppose that Capt. Gurdial Singh had much idea where they were, and Lairg could have been used as a generic local name? N.B I have not found in the National Archives any Reinforcement Unit War Diaries beyond 1940.

Another piece of relevant information in the files of the War Office at the National Archives - reference WO199/917 - is that in June 1943, 815 men were repatriated to India, and the expectation was that these would be replaced in August (but I do not think this happened). On the file is a detailed count of the numbers in the Indian Contingent post-repatriation as at 17 July 1943. The numbers in the Reinforcement Unit (which we know was at Dornoch then) were 6 British officers, 1 Indian officer, 4 VCOs (i.e. Indian NCOs), 3 British other ranks and 128 Indian other ranks - total 142.

### **Dornoch Proncynain Cemetery RIASC War Graves**

From the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) records and the Statutory Death Registrations I have gathered the following information relating to the two RIASC graves at Proncynain Cemetery.

Abdul Ra(k)hman from 7 Company died on 1st January 1944 in the Dornoch IGH (i.e. Indian General Hospital, probably a requisitioned mansion or hotel). However, I do not think that this necessarily means that the company itself was at Dornoch then. My reasoning is that the death certificate states that he had been suffering from acute TB for four months. 7 Company was at Muir of Ord at least until 31/10/43 before it moved to Knock in Banffshire. In his circumstances I think it is most unlikely that he was moved to Knock and then to Dornoch. Abdul Ra(k)hman would probably have been hospitalised from Muir of Ord to the Dornoch facility supporting 32 and 42 Companies.

Ghulam Nabi died on 28 September 1943 in the Dornoch Hotel, which local information indicates was used as a billet by the RIASC. He had been ill with TB for five months (i.e. since April) so he could well have been from one of the two companies that over-wintered in Scotland (nos. 3 and 29). 7, 25, 32 and 42 Companies all returned to Scotland from the south in early July 1943 and it is unlikely that Ghulam Nabi would have been brought north in his condition. Although at the time of his death 32 Company was based at Lairg, and 42 Coy was based at Lairg or Golspie until at least 28/8/43 it seems unlikely that he was from either of these companies.