

British Expedition to Tibet (1903-1904)



Tibet: A vassal state under the Chinese Empire

Chinese Emperor

- Chinese Amban

Tibet Government

- Dalai Lama
- Panchen Lama
- Kalün (Ministers)




Background:
The Great Game
between Britain
and Russia





RUSSIAN EXPANSION IN ASIA


 Russia in 1533

ACQUISITIONS

 1533–1689

 1689–1801

 Alexander I
(1801–25)

 Nicholas I
(1825–55)

 Alexander II
(1855–81)

 Alexander III
(1881–94)



1858–1864,
440,000 square
kilometres of land
in northwest China.

1865, Tashkent

1871, Ili,
approaching the
Tibetan Plateau.



1835, Darjeeling

1846, Kashmir,

1861, Sikkim

1865, part of Bhutan

Successively occupied Sikkim, Bhutan, Ladakh and many other mountain states in foothills of the Himalayas.

“chain line of defence” between India and Central Asia



Once the Russian Empire controls Tibet:

- Invade the Chinese Empire
- Occupy the commanding heights.
Invalidate the chain line of defence built by the British

(which means the Russians can go bypass it and attack India from Tibet southward.)

Making sure Tibet does not fall into Russian hands is the key to protect British India from Russian treats.



THE SIKKIM EXPEDITION: BRIGADIER-GENERAL GRAHAM AND OFFICERS.
FROM A PHOTOGRAPH.

Tension
Before the
Expedition



The British took control of Sikkim in 1861, and Sikkim became a British protectorate. But Tibet's influence on Sikkim was not eliminated.

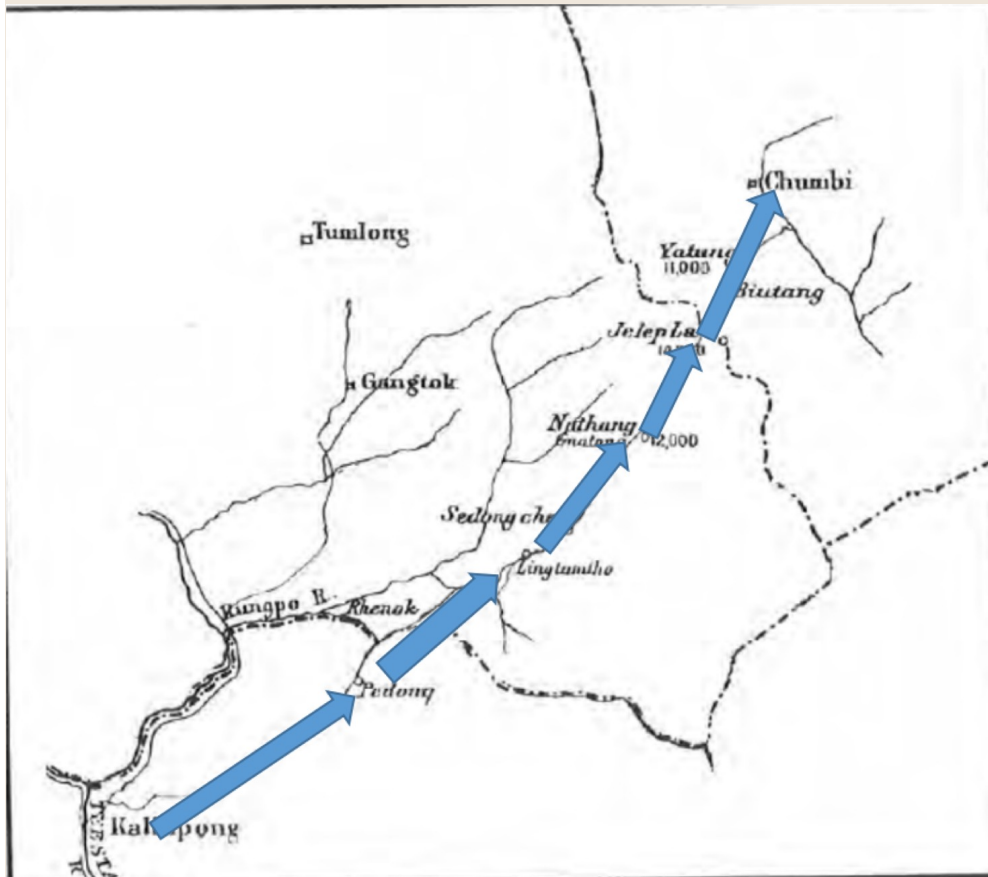
The King of Sikkim still considered himself a vassal of Tibet and the Qing Dynasty, so he formed an alliance with Tibet and the Qing Dynasty.

Tibet, as a mysterious and conservative ancient country, refused all foreigners entering its territory.

1875, "Chefoo Convention" between China and Britain. British were allowed to enter Tibet.

1884, Macaulay Expedition (cancelled)

Tibet: this must be the prelude of British invasion. In 1886, banned British entrance send troops beyond border



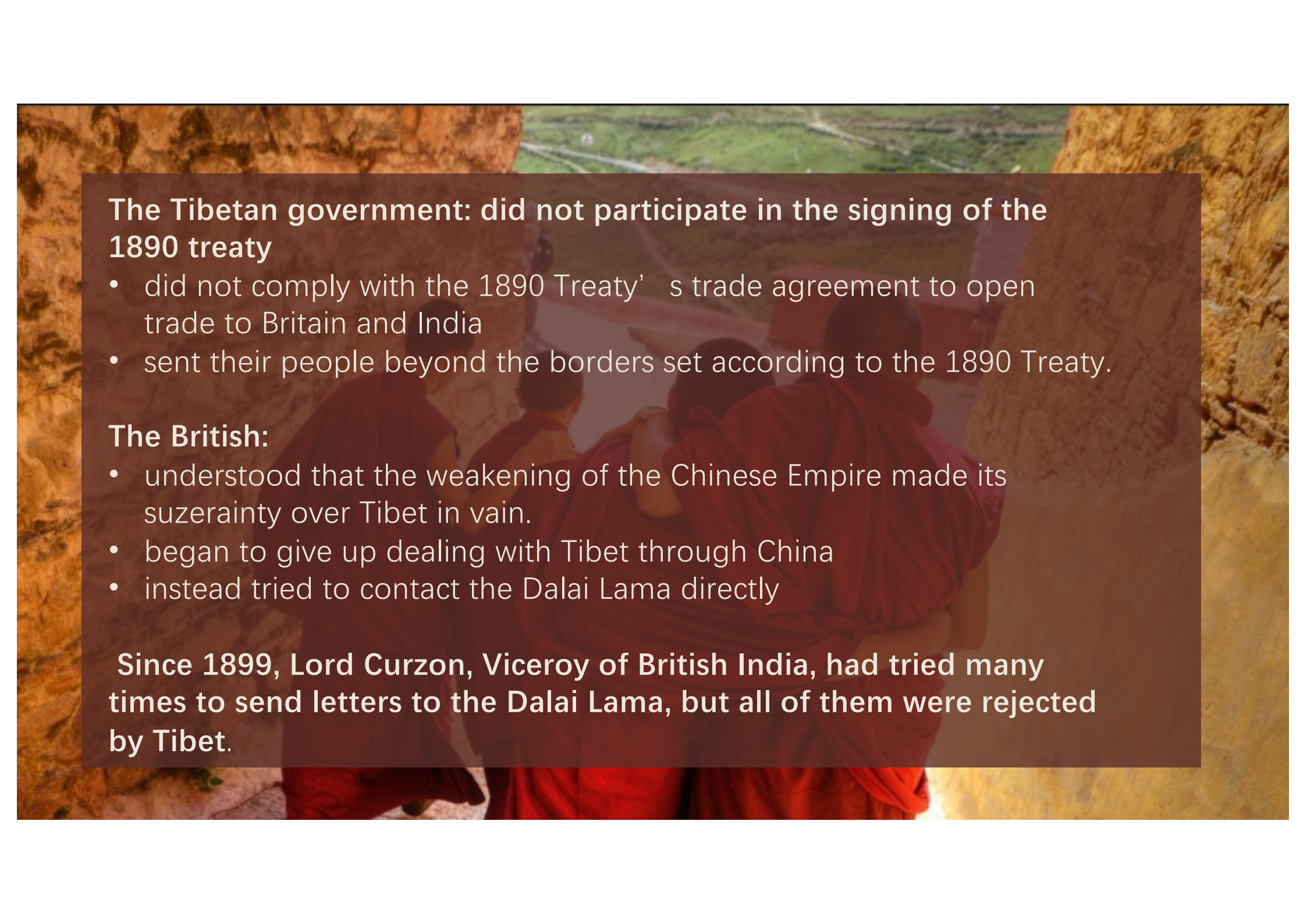
British: called the Chinese Government to order Tibet to withdraw troops, failed

1888, Sikkim Expedition, defeat of Tibetan Army

1890, Convention of Calcutta, (some renewals in 1893):

- Tibet give up its suzerainty over Sikkim
- Open Yatung as a trading city for British businessmen

British occupied the whole Sikkim

A group of Buddhist monks in maroon robes are seen from behind, standing on a stone path that overlooks a valley. The valley below is green and appears to be a cultivated area, possibly a farm or a small town. The surrounding hills are rocky and brown. The scene is captured in a high-angle shot, looking down from the monks' perspective.

The Tibetan government: did not participate in the signing of the 1890 treaty

- did not comply with the 1890 Treaty's trade agreement to open trade to Britain and India
- sent their people beyond the borders set according to the 1890 Treaty.

The British:

- understood that the weakening of the Chinese Empire made its suzerainty over Tibet in vain.
- began to give up dealing with Tibet through China
- instead tried to contact the Dalai Lama directly

Since 1899, Lord Curzon, Viceroy of British India, had tried many times to send letters to the Dalai Lama, but all of them were rejected by Tibet.

1900, the Tsar: met with a figure believed to be close to the Dalai Lama, which shocked the British.

Russia: this person is **not visiting Russia on a political mission.**

A rumour in Britain and India: Russia and China had reached an agreement to preserve China's integrity, and in exchange, China will cede all the interests of Tibet to Russia.

In January 1903, Curzon: **Britain should realise its influence on Tibet as soon as possible.**

Russia:

- No secret agreement with China
- Would not have any political plans for Tibet
- But Russia paid attention to maintaining the integrity of the Chinese Empire.

April, 16, 1903, Curzon:

- requested the British government to send a mission with armed personnel to go directly to Lhasa to communicate with China and Tibet,
- also demanded to bring 200 armed escorts and prepare reinforcements in Sikkim. Once the appointment fails, the British should directly advance to Shigatse and Gyantse

May 28, 1903, the **British government agreed**, but **could not mention about establishing a British political representative office in Tibet.**

This was **a compromise solution** for Britain to **avoid causing more diplomatic disputes and intensifying the confrontation between Britain and Russia** on the Tibet issue after receiving the assurance that Russia would not seek any political interests in Tibet.

- The Indian government finally issued a notice to the Chinese Government on June 3,
- Dispatched Colonel **Younghusband** as a commissioner to form the “**Tibet Frontier Commission**”
- meet with Chinese and Tibetan representatives at Kamba Dzong (closest location to the disputed border)

The British emphasised:

Tibet **must bring the most senior Tibetan official** who can fully represent Lhasa to attend the talks, so as to avoid the content of the talks being denied by Tibet again.

Francis Younghusband was born in 1863 to a British military family in Murree (now Pakistan), British India.

- In 1881 he entered the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, and in 1882 he was promoted to lieutenant in the 1st King's Cavalry Guards.
- 1886-1887, carried out an expedition, from Manchuria to northern China, then through the Mongolian Gobi, over the Tianshan Mountains, along the northern foot of the Tianshan Mountains to the Pamirs.
- For this achievement, he was elected the youngest member of the Royal Geographical Society and received the Society's Gold Medal.
- 1890, transferred to the Indian Political Service, served as Political Commissioner
- 1904 after this expedition, the Knight Commander of the Order of the Indian Empire, 2nd class
- In 1906, Younghusband resided in Kashmir as a British representative before returning to England to become an active member of various clubs and associations.



Waiting for
negotiations
in the winter



Youngusband and his commission in Kamba Dzong

five months

met with Ho Kuang-Tsieh, a director of the Chinese commission in Tibet, as well as the Dalai Lama's representative.

Tibetan:

- too many armed forces
- demanded that Youngusband and his commission all return to Sikkim for re-negotiation.

British side:

- The Chinese representative, He kuang-Tsieh, was considered too low rank.
- asked the *Amban* (Chinese Commissioner in Tibet) to send senior officials to come

But Ho Kuang-Tsieh and his successor were unable to hand over because the Tibetan side refused to provide transportation assistance.

Also, for this reason, the newly appointed *Amban* by the Qing Government was delayed in taking office in Lhasa.

During the five months in Kamba Dzong, no negotiation between China, Britain and Tibet.

During Younghusband's stay in Kamba

2 British Sikkim spies were detained by the local government of Shigatse. The British demanded the Tibetan side return the two people, claiming that the Tibetan authorities "detained British citizens" .

In August, a yak team to transport supplies for the commission suffered a large number of deaths due to delays on the way.

The British believed that it was caused by the obstruction of the Tibetans.

Tibet assembled troops to garrison in Yatung, Kamba, and other places.

This was considered to be hostile actions to provoke a war.

Younghusband and the British government realised: **resolving the Tibet issue through peaceful means might be impossible.**

the anti-Russian sentiment in Japan was high: A war between Japan and Russia would break out soon: **no need to worry about Russia.**

Curzon: set plan to occupy Chumpi, Gyantse and other places.

On October 26, he called Brodrick, the new Minister of Indian Affairs, saying that the mission was in vain due to the obstruction of the negotiation by the Tibetans, the hostile behaviour and the negligence and delay of the Chinese. All the British peace policies since 1888 had failed, and the only result is to make the Tibetans think that the Indian and British governments are weak and can be bullied. Therefore, the British thought they had to teach the Tibetans a lesson.

On November 6, Brodrick replied to the Indian government that the operation was permitted.



On December 11, British troops crossed Mount Zelirah at an altitude of 14,390 feet and captured Chumpi on December 14.

On the 18th of December, General MacDonald, with a small advance force, headed lightly to Phari, arriving on the 21st.

By January 4, 1904, Younghusband and other commission members and the rest of the troops also arrived in Phari to join the vanguard.

During this time, the British army suffered from severe cold and insufficient supplies, and the livestock responsible for transporting supplies suffered heavy losses.



On January 7, British troops arrived at Tuna. Tuna is the only way to enter Gyantse.

The Tibetan army:

begun to deploy in the Guru area:

- Two Depons in Lhasa, two Depons in Shigatse, one Depon each in Gyantse and Tingri, led a total of 3,000 Tibetan troops to garrison here.
- The commander-in-chief: Depon Lhading-se, (“Lhasa General”)
- Tibetan army did not intend to attack, but tried to expel the British army by negotiation.

The Tibetans said

- Tibet always prohibit all Europeans from entering Tibet to protect their religion.
- Asked Younghusband to take his people back to Yatung.

Younghusband understand that the root cause of ignoring the Chinese government' s rule and preventing the British from establishing contact with Tibet was these lamas:
the prohibition was actually protecting the lamas and other monks' privileges.

Younghusband: if he did not invade Lhasa and completely destroy the authority of the lamas, all the work of the British government on the Tibetan issue would be fruitless

Similar negotiations had been held several times, and the content was probably the same as before

In this way, the British and Tibetan sides faced off here for two months.

During the period, the British and Indian troops suffered a lot.

In mid-March, MacDonald brought

- three ten-pounder cannons,
- one seven-pounder cannon,
- four companies of the 32nd Sikh Pioneers,
- and three and a half companies of the 8th Gurkhas,

from Chumbi, along with support troops such as engineers and field hospitals, they arrived at Tuna on March 28.

Massacre of
Chumik
Shenko



Massacre of Chumik Shenko

On March 31, the British army advanced to the Tibetan army position in Chumik Shenko. There was a Tibetan defence line, and more than 3,000 Tibetan soldiers. They were equipped with old muskets and were protected by a 1.5-meter-high stone wall.

Younghusband claimed that he would negotiate with the Tibetan army officers. So, the Tibetan army commander, the “Lhasa General” , Depon Lhading-se and his adjutant came to negotiate.

The British army continued to advance while the Tibetan army chief was negotiating with Younghusband until the Tibetan army was forced to retreat behind the stone wall on the defensive line.

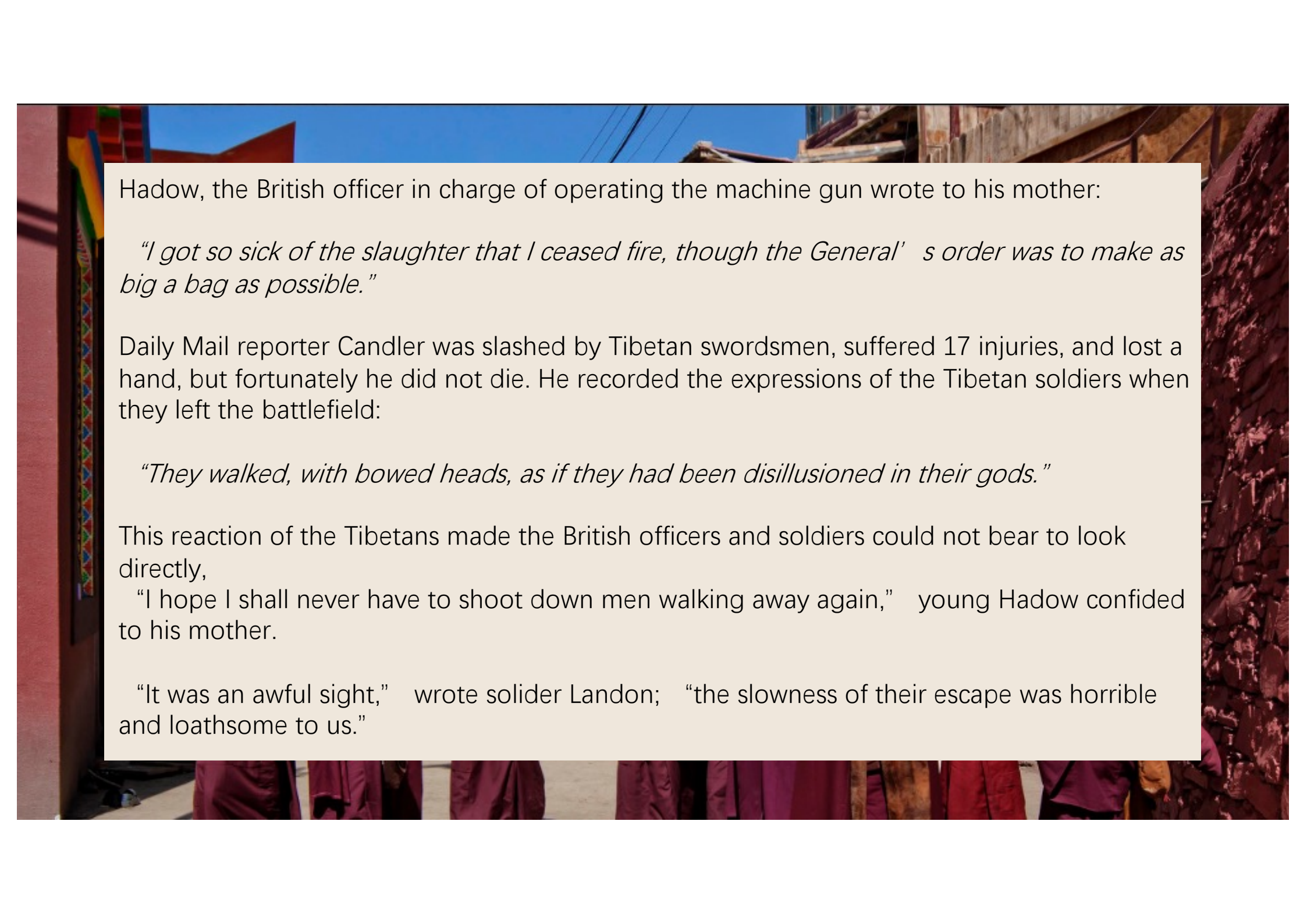
Seeing that the negotiation failed, Younghusband and MacDonald ordered the Tibetan army to be forcibly disarmed.

The Tibetan army resisted when they were forcibly disarmed by the British army.

In the chaos, the “Lhasa General” used a pistol to kill a Sikkim soldier who tried to snatch his weapon.

This gunshot broke the chaos, and for a while the British began to shoot at the Tibetans.





Hadow, the British officer in charge of operating the machine gun wrote to his mother:

“I got so sick of the slaughter that I ceased fire, though the General’s order was to make as big a bag as possible.”

Daily Mail reporter Candler was slashed by Tibetan swordsmen, suffered 17 injuries, and lost a hand, but fortunately he did not die. He recorded the expressions of the Tibetan soldiers when they left the battlefield:

“They walked, with bowed heads, as if they had been disillusioned in their gods.”

This reaction of the Tibetans made the British officers and soldiers could not bear to look directly,

“I hope I shall never have to shoot down men walking away again,” young Hadow confided to his mother.

“It was an awful sight,” wrote soldier Landon; “the slowness of their escape was horrible and loathsome to us.”

According to Younghusband' s record, each British soldier fired only thirteen rounds on average, or just fired two magazines.

Tibetan Army: **700 of the 1,500 died** (including the commander, the “Lhasa General” , Depon Lhading-se)

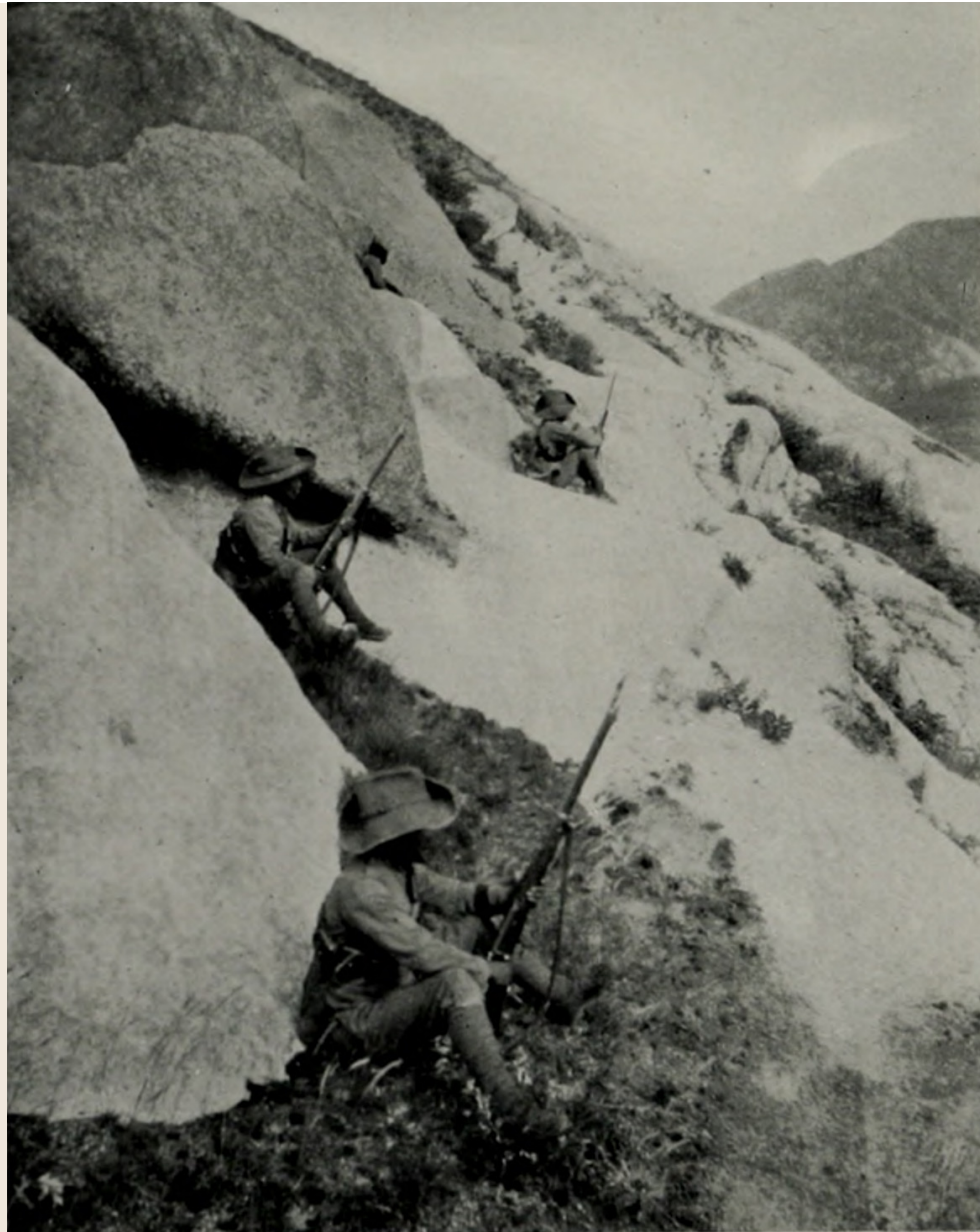
168 wounded

6 British troopers wounded, and no one was killed in the operation.

The Chinese Amban did not protest against the British but instead blamed the Tibetan army officers for their resistance.

The incident spread to England, British statemen denounced Younghusband' s action as “**the massacre of unarmed civilians**” . Some media in Britain even started to abuse Younghusband. This event is known as the “**Massacre of Chumik Shenko**” .

Younghusband did not deny the significance of the action. He believed that the punishment to the Dalai Lama would make Tibet compromise, stop fighting and seek negotiations with the British side as soon as possible.



After the brutal “battle” was over in Tuna, the British army took a short rest.

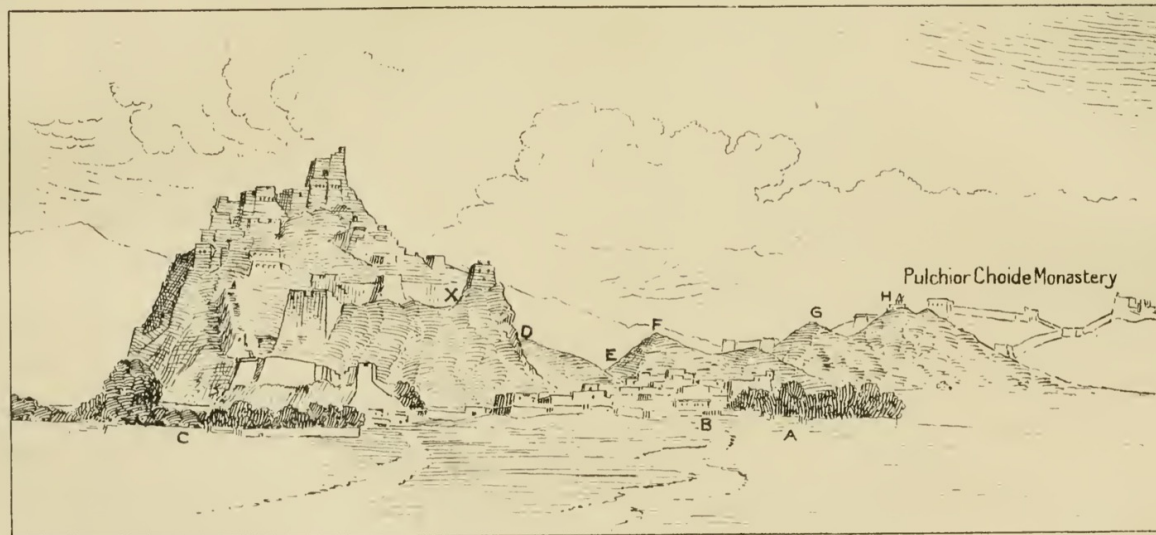
MacDonald led the main force to return to Chumbi, while Younghusband led the commission and a small number of guards to Gyantse on April 5.

The British army was often attacked by the Tibetan army on the way to Gyantse. One of the more intense is the battle that took place in Karo-la and Kangmar.



Battle of Gyantse

RECONNAISSANCE SKETCH FROM THE PALLA VILLAGE



(Sd.) N. V. L. RYBOT, Lieut.,
28th P.

Lettering corresponds to that on plan.
X is point where breach was made and entry effected.

⊙ Position of Palla Post.

Intelligence Branch N° 7003.

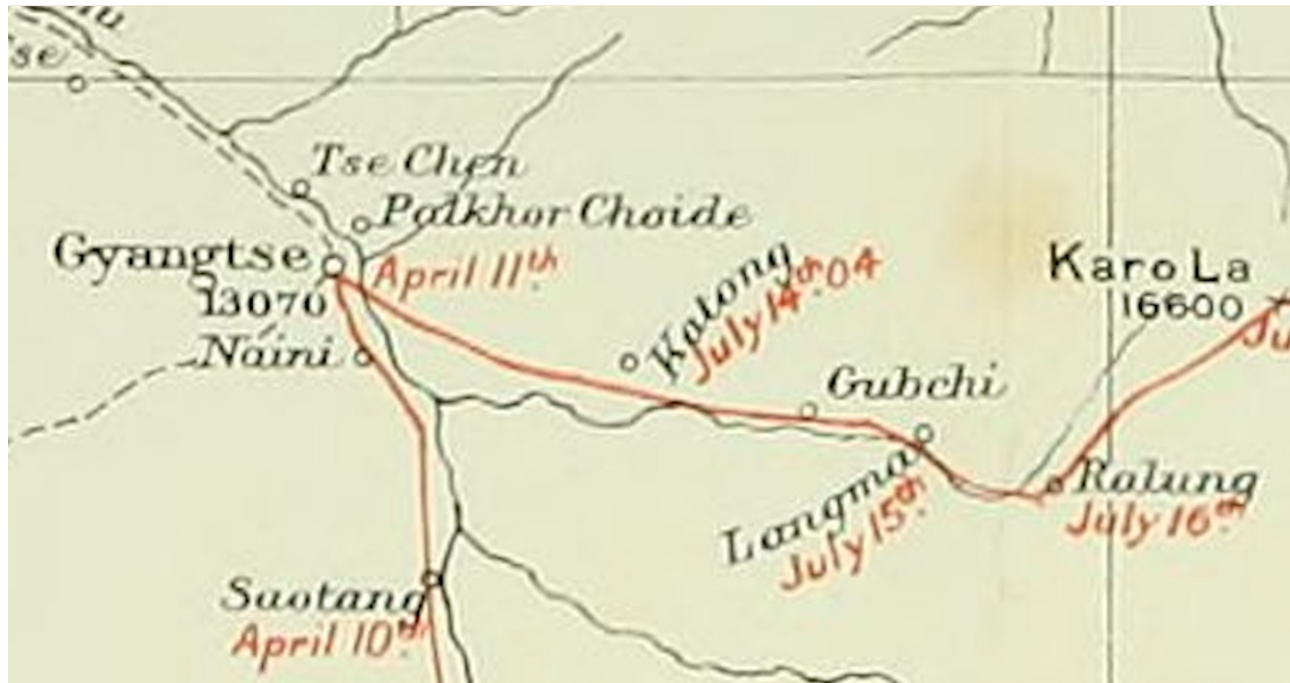
On April 11, British troops arrived in Gyantse.

Gyantse has two main characteristics.

- Gyantse Dzong. (castle)
- Palkhor Choide Temple

The temple was also surrounded by tall solid stone walls.

The British army set up defensive positions near Gyantse.



On April 24th, Younghusband heard that the Tibetan army was on defence at Karo-ra on the way to Lhasa and had already deployed seven or eight hundred men.

To confirm the rumours, on April 28, the British army dispatched a Lieutenant Colonel Brander led a cavalry company to Karo-ra for reconnaissance.

Company Commander Hoggson brought back news on May 1:

- Tibetan troops were in the valley three miles outside the Karo-ra Mountains.
- about 1,000 to 1,500 men

On May 2, Lieutenant Colonel Brander attacked Karo-ra

- with three companies of the 32nd Sikh Pioneers and one company of the 8th Gurkhas, plus two seven-pounder cannons and two machine guns.

Youngusband and the remaining army were left with less than 200 people.

At 4:30am next morning, 1000 Tibetans attacked Youngusband' s camp but finally defeated by the British.

The captured Tibetan soldiers said that these troops were the main force of the Tibetan army dispatched from Lhasa, and their equipment was better than the local army.

- According to Youngusband' s account, about 250 Tibetans died
- The reporter Candler recorded more than 140 deaths, while the British had two deaths and five wounded.

Historical studies in mainland China recorded that the Tibetan army almost wiped out the British army and almost captured Youngusband alive.

On May 6, Lieutenant Colonel Brander successfully cleared the Karo-ra Pass.

- Brander said that the large number of Tibetan troops nearby might have formed a siege of the British army.

On May 7, Brander returned to Gyantse to join Younghusband

On May 24th, MacDonald sent troops from Chumbi to Gyantse to reinforce Younghusband.

- With them were two ten-pound mountain cannons under the command of Lieutenant Easton,
- an Indian company of engineers,
- fifty Sikkim and twenty mounted infantries,
- and Captain Sheppard with his troops from the Royal Fusiliers.

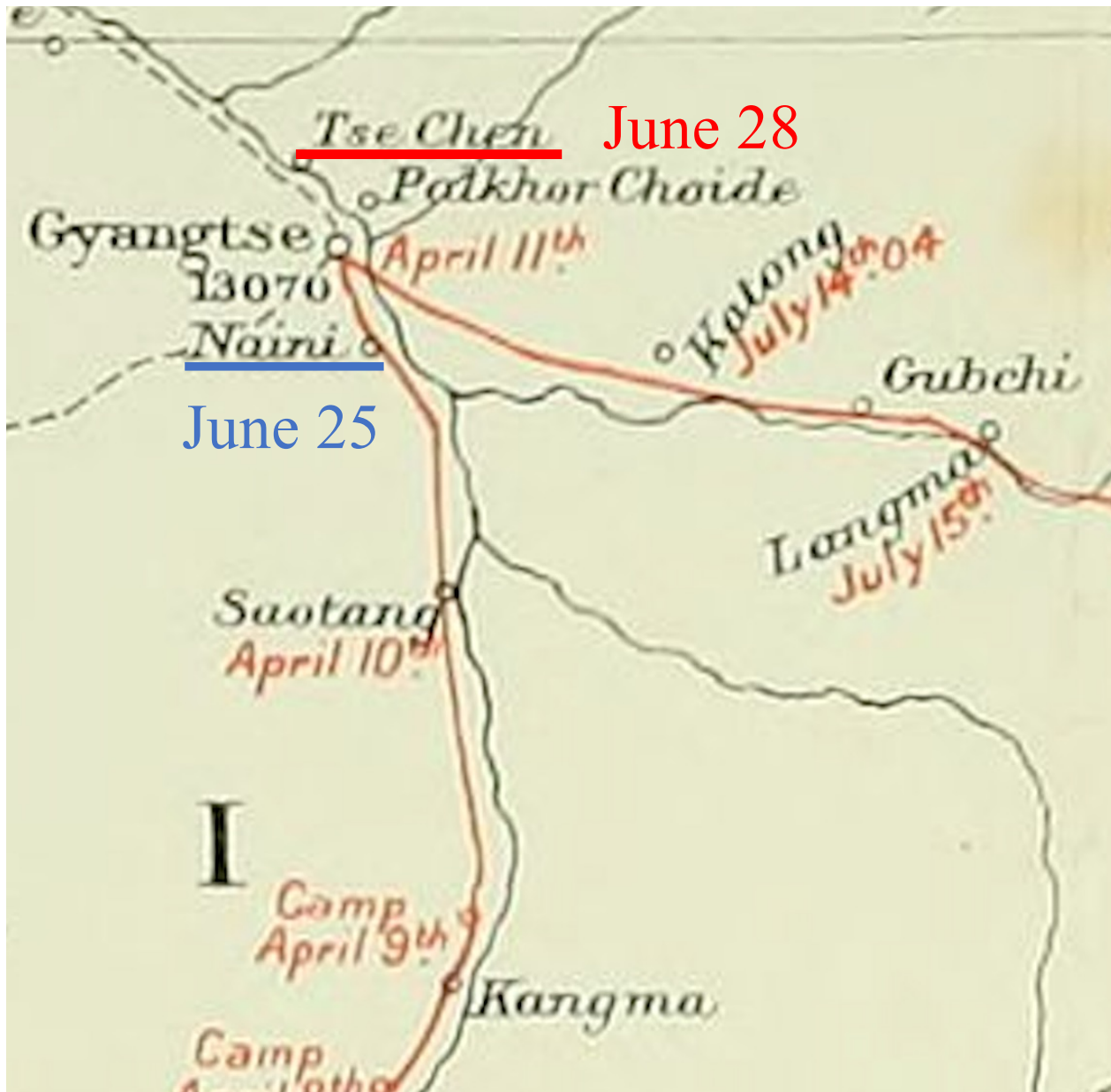
Royal Fusiliers before departure



At night, May 26, British troops advanced and attacked the Tibetan garrisoned village (1,100 yards away)

- Captain Sheppard and Captain O'Connor detonated explosives in the house where the Tibetan army was stationed and achieved excellent results.
- Others followed, but in a mistake, Lieutenant Garstin was killed.
- Eleven more Indian soldiers were wounded in the fighting.
- Major Peterson of Sikh Pioneers ordered the house to be bombarded with artillery fire.

Finally, under the onslaught of the British army, the village of Pala was occupied.



On June 13th, Younghusband and MacDonald led the troops to advance

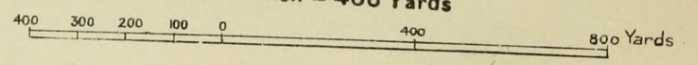
On June 25th, arrived at Nani Temple

On June 28, attacked Tse-cheng Temple

During these days of battle, Captain Gaster was killed, and three other British soldiers were wounded.

SKETCH
of the
JONG AND GOMPA
of
GYANTSE

Scale 1 inch = 400 Yards



Direction of feint on 5th July 1904.

2 cannons
6 infantry companies
(3:30 pm. Jul. 5)

- Attack of the South-eastern point
- Attack of the Gyantse City
- Charging and climbing the broken wall
- Artillery support

The artillery made a breach on the wall at 4:00 pm. Jul. 6
Then Gurkhas started charging and climbing led by Capt. Grant (Victoria Cross) finally captured the Dzong

GUN HILL
2. 7 prs: (large)
1. 7 " (small)
2 Maxims
(23rd Pioneers)
Capt. Sheppard, Royal Fusiliers

Major Campbell
40 Pathans (Right)

Major Murry
8th Gurkhas (Left)

(3:30 am, Jul. 6)
Palla Post Reserve
12th infantry companies
1st mounted infantry
1/2 engineer company
(Sd.) C. H. D. RYDER, Captain R. E., (night, Jul 5-6)
Survey of India.

City Captured
(7:00 am, Jul. 6)

--- British lines of Attack and Defence.
■ Entrenched positions occupied by enemy.

2, 10 prs: N^o 7 M. B.
2, 7 " " 30 " "

Intelligence Branch N^o 7000.

Attack of Gyantse City and Gyantse Dzong



Advance towards
Lhasa

- After the fall of Gyantse, the Tibetan army commander Kalün Uto convened more than 1,400 troops to deploy in Nagarzê
- At the same time, conscription notices were issued to Shigatse, Namling, Kya Tso and other places.

However, Yu' tai, the Chinese Amban, did not support Tibet' s continued resistance to Britain, but advocated peace talks with Britain.

- Therefore, at the request of the Amban, the Tibetan government transferred Kalün Uto back to Lhasa, and the Tibetan army also retreated in large numbers.

Therefore, except for the two sporadic blocking on July 17 and July 19, the British troops were not blocked by the Tibetans.

On July 31, the British army successfully crossed the Brahmaputra River.

The 13th Dalai Lama

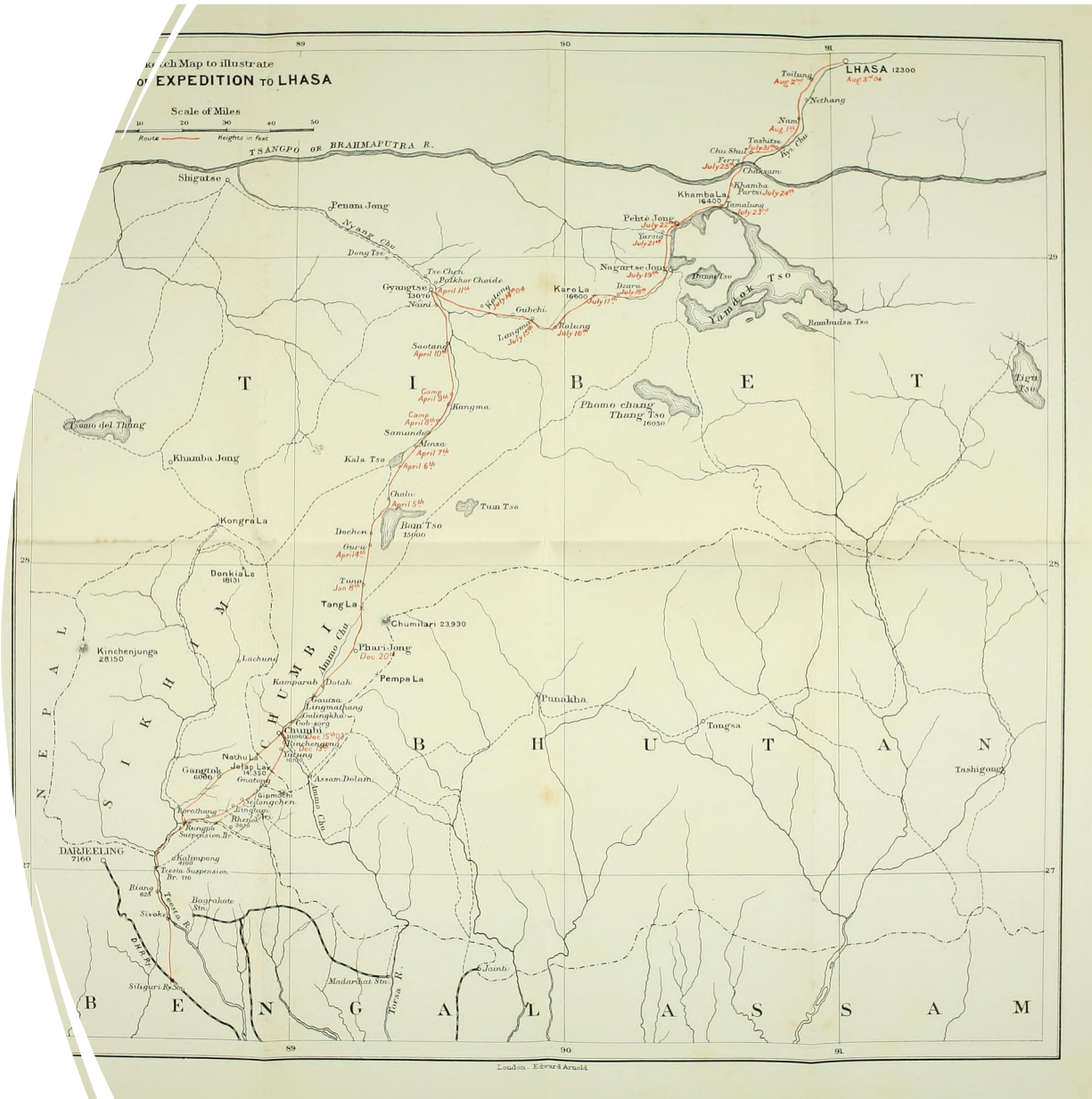
- urgently convened a meeting and handed over the political and religious affairs of Tibet to the two Kalüns for decision.
- left Tibet and went to Beijing to meet the Emperor Guangxu and the Empress Dowager via Kulun (today's Ulaanbaatar).

On August 3, 1904, British troops entered Lhasa. At this point, the military operation came to an end.

The British Indian Government awarded **Tibet Medals** to those who participated in Younghusband's expedition



Review of the military action



The British army

the 8th Gurkhas, 40th Pathans, 23rd and 32nd Sikh Pioneers, 19th Punjab Infantry and the Royal Fusiliers. 1,150 combatants, as well as numerous non-combatants and entourages. (202 KIA, 411 non-combat deaths)

Advantage

- excellent weapons
- heavy fire support such as machine guns and cannons.
- well-trained regular troops with actual combat experience.
- Races such as the Gurkhas in the British army also had strong plateau mobility.

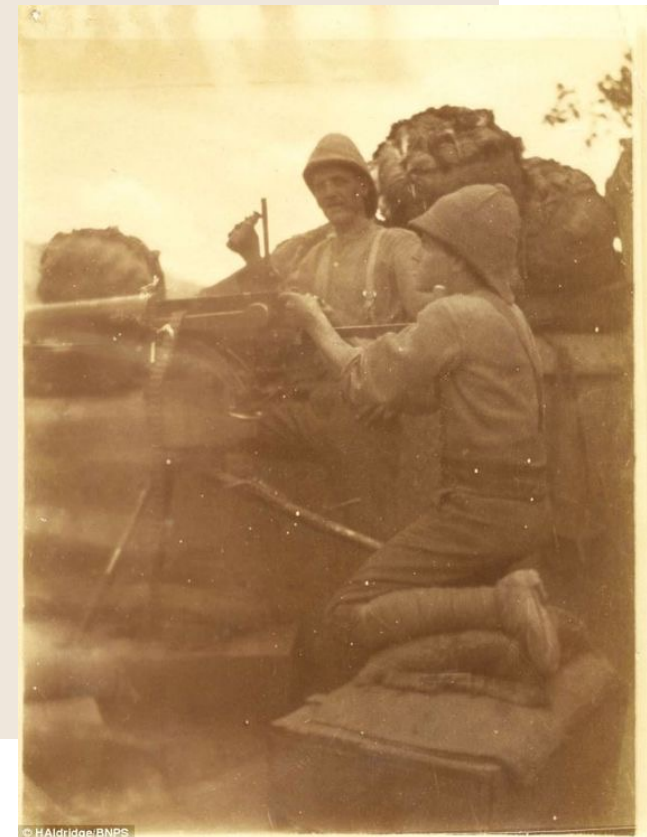
Weakness

- logistical supplies.
- Terrain and climatic conditions: high altitudes, lack of oxygen
- physically difficult to adapt to
- troubled by frostbite, pneumonia, and hypoxia.

Therefore, the non-combat attrition caused by the Tibet expedition far exceeded the combat damage.



MLE MKI Rifle and Maxim Gun



In the hypoxic environment of the plateau, the explosion efficiency of the shell was much higher than that on the flat ground

so the time required for igniting the fuse and aiming was also greatly different from fighting on the plain.

The experience of past artillery battles was not applicable, officers and soldiers needed to recalculate in multiple test firings.

This undoubtedly increased the difficulty of combat.



Mounted Infantry soldier and Soldier of the 40 Phathans

The Tibetan army

Advantages

- a large number of people
- familiar with the terrain
- good at surprise attacks
- could adapt to the environment here and were not troubled by cold and altitude sickness.

Weakness

- weapons were backward (no heavy fire, still used outdated muskets and cold weapons)
- tactics were rigid
- lack of training
- the country' s ability to mobilise was poor (most of the troops were temporarily recruited)
- did not understand the situation of the battle, nor did they have any sense of why they are fighting



Results



September 7, 1904, “Lhasa Treaty”

- Younghusband signed on behalf of Britain
- the abbots of Kalün, three major monasteries and the leaders of the people's assembly represented Tibet to draw and seal.
- the Amban, Yu' tai, did not sign it.

The key points of the treaty are:

- 1. Tibet should effectively implement the Calcutta Treaty in 1890.*
- 2. Yatung, Gyantse, and Gartok are opened as commercial ports, and Britain enjoys privileges in these three places.*
- 3. Any changes to the Calcutta Treaty will be discussed at another meeting.*
- 4. The British send officials to stay in the commercial ports to supervise British business.*
- 5. Tibet should compensate the United Kingdom £500,000, or 7.5 million rupees. Annual payment of one hundred thousand rupees, paid in 75 years.*
- 6. The British garrison troops in Chumbi and withdrew after three years of reparations.*
- 7. Tibet needs to dismantle the forts, cottages and all facilities that obstruct traffic on the border between Tibet and India.*
- 8. The land in Tibet shall not be leased or sold to any foreign country. All matters in Tibet shall not be interfered by any foreign country. No foreign country shall be allowed to send official personnel to Tibet. Other rights such as railways, mines, and telecommunications in Tibet are not allowed to be enjoyed by any foreign country or foreigner. Once a foreign country obtains these rights, the same rights should be granted to Britain. The Tibetan government shall not use taxes and goods to mortgage loans to foreign countries and foreigners.*

After the signing of the Lhasa Treaty, British troops withdrew from Lhasa on September 23, 1904. On November 11, the Viceroy of India ratified the Treaty, but modified the contents:

- *The amount of indemnity is reduced to Rs 2.5 million.*
- *The period of British occupation of the Chon Pi Valley was changed to three years.*
- *Remove the additional term that British officials stationed in Gyantse have the right to enter Lhasa.*

In January 1905, China negotiated with the British Indian government, asking Britain to recognise China's sovereignty over Tibet, while Britain claimed that China had only suzerainty over Tibet.

In April 1906, the Sino-British negotiations continued in Beijing. On April 27, Chinese officials signed six articles of the Convention Between Great Britain and China Respecting Tibet. The key points of the treaty are:

- *The British government promised not to occupy the territory of Tibet and not to interfere in all Tibetan politics, and the Chinese government would not allow other countries to occupy Tibet or interfere in Tibetan affairs.*
- *The rights stated in Section 4, Clause 9, of the Lhasa Treaty are exclusively for China, and are not enjoyed by other countries and their nationals; but Britain has the right, after negotiating with China, to lay telegraph lines connecting to India in various commercial ports.*

Influence



Since then, the British Empire has established the India-Tibet border and got commercial ports in Tibet.

- The trade route between India and Tibet was changed from the previous route through the Kathmandu Valley to the Chumbi Valley.

In 1907, Britain and Russia signed a treaty. And the following is a part of the treaty related to Tibet:

In conformity with the admitted principle of the suzerainty of China over Tibet, Great Britain and Russia engage not to enter into negotiations with Tibet except through the intermediary of the Chinese Government.

Thus, the Great Game between Britain and Russia in Central Asia came to an end.

Regarding the expansion of British influence in Tibet, the Chinese government

- quickly took a series of measures to consolidate its weakened rule
- lay the foundation for the modernisation of Tibet.

However, at the executive level,

- Chinese troops often clashed with Tibetans
- which affected the relationship between the Tibetan government and the Chinese government.

Tibet

- began to form alliances with the British or Russian influence to resist the direct intervention of the Chinese Empire here
- strengthened the Tibetan army, established the first modern Tibetan army in accordance with the British army, using many British equipment.

This also paved the way for the alienation of Tibet from Nanjing during the Republic of China period, the CPC' s rule, as well as the problems in Tibet nowadays.



A person wearing a white turban and dark clothing is seen from behind, spinning a row of golden prayer wheels in a dimly lit room. The scene is warm and atmospheric, with light filtering through the background. The text 'Thanks' is overlaid in white, with a solid brown rectangle above it. Below 'Thanks' are the Chinese characters '謝謝' and the Tibetan characters 'གཟིགས' in white.

Thanks

謝謝

གཟིགས

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