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The Kashmiri separatist movement has been distinctly lacking in political heavyweights. Abdul Ghani Lone was a substantial politician. He was a mainstream political figure, a one-time member of India's Congress party who in the 1970s served as a minister in the Jammu and Kashmir state government. Then the changing currents of Kashmiri politics, compounded by his disaffection with rigged elections and Delhi's perpetual interference, prompted him to embrace the separatist movement. His party, the People's Conference, although it had its armed wing and its links with the insurgency (and, according to Indian intelligence, with Pakistan's intelligence agency), was never in the hardline pro-Pakistan lobby. He was a moderate within the main separatist alliance, the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, which he helped to found—a seasoned, articulate representative of the Kashmiri cause who understood the purpose of conventional politics and the limits of armed struggle.

In October 1993, on one of my first reporting visits to Srinagar, I looked on as Abdul Ghani Lone was beaten up and arrested by members of India's Border Security Force for attempting to lead a demonstration. It was a time of tension in the Kashmir Valley. Armed separatists had taken refuge in Kashmir's most revered Islamic shrine, at Hazratbal on the outskirts of Srinagar. Indian troops were besieging them. The security forces were on edge, and the mood in the Kashmir capital was volatile. I was shocked as much by the audacity of the troops in assaulting a prominent political figure in front of the TV cameras (there was a clumsy attempt to suppress the footage) as by the violence itself. A group of reporters later harangued the Sikh commanding officer and asked to see the arrested politicians and to assess whether they had been badly hurt. He laughed off the demand, saying they were all inside enjoying a cup of tea.

Lone wasn't released from detention for a year. He told me much later that after his arrest, the BSF soldiers, far from offering him tea, carried



out a brutal attack. ‘They ruthlessly beat me. I was left half dead.’¹ He also showed me round his massively fortified house in Srinagar, boxed in by a high fence and security grilles. It wasn’t sufficient protection. There had been a series of grenade attacks, and a massive car bomb explosion. He pointed out cracks in the walls and floors caused by the blasts. The local police, he said, had told him the name of those responsible. They had mentioned an army officer working with what were termed ‘renegades’, young Kashmiris who had become armed militants and then had been cajoled or coerced by the Indian authorities into fighting their old comrades. Eventually, the gunmen got Abdul Ghani Lone. He was assassinated at a public meeting in Srinagar. But not by the army or their ‘renegade’ allies. He was shot by armed separatists.²

It is difficult to pinpoint the reason for an assassination, especially when no organisation has claimed responsibility. Lone was probably a target because he was perceived to be edging towards open dialogue with the Indian authorities and putting up candidates at elections. His party, a key constituent of the separatist movement, was teetering on the brink of re-engaging with mainstream politics. It was also perhaps a response to Lone’s strongly expressed criticism of the ‘guest’ militants. These outsiders who had come to Kashmir to fight in a jihad were, by the time of Lone’s death, probably more numerous than Valley-born insurgents.

It’s something of an irony that when he spoke to me about the inception of the Kashmir crisis in 1947, Abdul Ghani Lone was full of respect for those men from outside the Kashmir Valley who had taken to arms in the name of Islam and of Pakistan. Lone told me he was brought up in a village near Kupwara on the north-west fringes of the Kashmir Valley—an area now just on India’s side of the line of control. He recalled that he was about eleven years old at the time of the lashkar’s invasion, though if the obituaries are to be believed he was well into his teenage years in 1947. Memories made public, particularly of public figures, are often coloured by their political profile. Lone’s memory of the mood in his village was certainly unambiguous. ‘People at that time were out and out for Pakistan,’ he declared emphatically. ‘They were saying at that time that the maharaja has run away, he has left for Jammu. And people were very much opposing him, because he had joined the state with India. Nobody wanted India.’ He made the point that in his area, Pakistan was close at hand and was where locals would often head for work, while Jammu seemed a tremendous distance away and Delhi was even more remote.

The raiders had not reached his district during the initial invasion, Lone recalled. And those who entered his home village in a second wave

of operations early in 1948 were, he insisted, not tribesmen. They were from other parts of the former princely state, though from outside the Valley and not Kashmiri-speaking. 'Local people were very much receptive to them, very much joyful. And they welcomed them. People came out of their houses and welcomed them.' They controlled the village and surrounding area for about six months—he recalled—but in or around June 1948, the Indian army forced them out. 'I was a small boy, but when a contingent of the mujahideen had to retreat, and they were going from my village, people—more particularly womenfolk—they were crying. They were weeping—that Indian army is going to take us over. The Indian airplanes came and dropped a bomb in an adjacent village, and there was some firing, strafing also.'

In the wake of the Indian troops' advance, Sheikh Abdullah visited the Kupwara area. Lone remembered him as a popular figure with considerable support. 'I was one of the students playing in the band. [Sheikh Abdullah] made a small speech there—in Kashmiri. At that time he was speaking against the mujahideen. I was confused—why should he speak against them? In the heart of hearts, they were not liking Sheikh Abdullah criticising the mujahideen. At that time, people had no hatred for the mujahideen.' That was the first time Lone saw Sheikh Abdullah. They became political sparring partners. Abdul Ghani Lone was imprisoned several times. That experience, and the vantage point of his political loyalties, was bound to spill over into his narrative of events in 1947–48. But his account suggests that at least in some parts of the Kashmir Valley, Indian troops were seen from the start as an occupying force.

In Srinagar, where most residents welcomed Indian soldiers as saviours from a rampaging tribal army, there were undertows of tension. An incident early in the Indian military operation appears to have influenced a hardening of feeling among some Kashmiris towards the troops. The newspaper editor Sofi Ghulam Mohammad shared keen memories of the change of mood. The raiders were viewed by most people, certainly in Srinagar, as invaders, not liberators, he told me—and he repeated slogans in Urdu that echoed through the streets of the Kashmiri capital as Sheikh Abdullah led a popular movement to stall the attackers: 'You invaders beware, we Kashmiris are ready to fight you', 'Long live Sher-e-Kashmir [Lion of Kashmir Sheikh Abdullah]' and 'Long live Hindu–Sikh–Muslim unity'. He recalled the reception accorded to the Indian army when it was deployed in Srinagar. 'When they entered the city, there were cheers. They were garlanded. Most of them were Sikhs, Patiala Sikhs from Punjab.

National Conference people and the general people thought they have come here to save us, to save our property and save our lives.’

The atmosphere changed when Indian troops became entangled in a clash with a group of National Conference volunteers. One of Sofi Ghulam Mohammad’s friends was among those killed:

The mood of the people changed very immediately against the Indians. These Sikhs from the Punjab, they killed Kashmiris without any provocation. The dead bodies were detected by dogs and local people. Then there were slogans against India and in favour of Pakistan. The mood of the people changed only in a couple of days. I remember it very vividly. It’s a damn fact. . . .

They killed without provocation Kashmiri people who were guiding them. They were deputed by the National Conference to guide the Indian army, to show them the places that the invaders are. My colleague of my age, he was also killed by the Indian army at that time—very young boy.

Brigadier ‘Bogey’ Sen, one of the key Indian army officers repulsing the raiders, has acknowledged that specially selected National Conference volunteers conducted ‘reconnaissance missions many of which were very dangerous, [and] had brought in a great deal of information relating to the movement of the tribesmen’. He dated the clash with the volunteers to the night of 5 November—a time when the battle for control of the Valley remained undecided. A volunteer patrol returning from an outlying part of Srinagar was challenged by Sikh troops. Rather than responding, the volunteers ran away. The sentry opened fire, Sen recorded—in what is likely to be simply one side of the story. The following morning the bodies of two men were recovered from the road, and quietly buried by Indian troops in a trench. A furious Sheikh Abdullah summoned Brigadier Sen for an explanation. The Sikh troops were hurriedly redeployed away from that part of Srinagar. But aggrieved local residents disinterred the two bodies and carried them in procession through the main roads of the city. It was ‘a most explosive situation,’ Sen recounted.³ P.N. Jalali’s recollection is that about seven of his fellow volunteers were killed, and their bodies were carried in procession to the National Conference headquarters before the demonstrators were persuaded to hand them over for burial. The incident went largely unreported in the Indian press, though a few days later the *Times of India* commented tartly that

‘irresponsible, unruly conduct on the part of a few of the Indian soldiers does considerable harm to the common cause and military gains are merely jeopardised by political losses’.⁴

If Brigadier Sen got the date right, then the clash with Sheikh Abdullah’s supporters came before the showdown at Shalateng that precipitated the flight of the raiders, and several days ahead of the Indian army’s capture of Baramulla. In the ensuing battle for the hearts and minds of Kashmiris, the Indian army sought to remind the local population of the fate that had so nearly befallen them. Captured tribesmen were paraded and exhibited, partly as objects of curiosity but more to invoke Kashmiri gratitude for the Indian army in keeping such unkempt invaders at bay. Sofi Ghulam Mohammad recalled heading to the centre of Srinagar to catch a glimpse of the raiders. ‘When they were captured, they were brought to Srinagar, in Lal Chowk. Five or six invaders belonging to Peshawar. Thousands of people went to see them. I have seen them. They were handcuffed, four or five invaders. They were tribal, bearded, having those loose clothes—like Pathans, rough type of Pathans.’

The sight was etched in the memory of Srinagar residents who had lived through the crisis, especially those non-Muslims who had most to fear from the raiders. D.N. Kaul was then a police officer in the city:

I remember very vividly when two of these raiders were captured in Baramulla and brought in handcuffs to Srinagar. So, lots of people gathered. Two- or three-hundred in that Lal Chowk. And they were mounted on top of the roof of a truck, and somebody questioned them then. ‘Why did you have the bravado and guts to come here,’ he said. ‘No, we were told that the territory is ours and the loot is yours . . . We were told: you conquer this territory—the loot, whatever you gain [as] loot, is yours, but we are interested in the territory part of it.’

Kaul was clear that the raiders were conquering at the behest of Pakistan. Harshi Anand, then a fourteen-year-old schoolgirl, was also among the crowds in the centre of Srinagar. ‘Yes, yes, I saw them,’ she told me. ‘When [the] Indian army came, they captured them, three or four, and they brought them to Lal Chowk. [A] mob gathered there, and they were throwing chappals [sandals] and they were abusing them. Those people, they were really looking like brutes—very ferocious looking. They were also very defiant. They were just roped and they were standing there. [I

thought] that these are brutes and very bad people.’ And the arousing of that sort of sentiment was no doubt the purpose of the exercise.

A few captured raiders were also put on display to inform and entertain visiting political leaders and reporters. Sat Paul Sahni, then a raw young journalist, covered Jawaharlal Nehru’s visit to the Kashmir Valley a few days after Indian troops took control of Baramulla. ‘The Prime Minister was invited into a tent,’ he recalled, ‘where three of the lashkar individuals, soldiers you might call them or individuals—and they were there. And they were all Pathans, Afridis. We met them. We talked to them. And they said we didn’t know why we were here, but we were asked to go for a jihad, that there were atrocities being committed on Muslims in Kashmir, so we were asked to go and liberate them.’ It may have been the same bunch of prisoners that the reporter Margaret Parton of the *Herald Tribune* came across in Baramulla, again just a few days after the raiders retreated from the town. ‘We saw some of them in Baramula yesterday,’ she wrote in a letter to her mother, ‘and with the sight went any lingering thoughts I might have had that a tribal raider was a romantic figure.’

There were four prisoners who had been left behind in the flight from Kashmir and who had been captured by Indian troops. Never have I seen such disgusting, grotesque figures: one of them, a hulking giant with a filthy grey beard through which straggled one protruding yellow tooth, wore blue checked plus fours, kahki [sic] puttees, a blue RAF jacket, and torn sandals. An unclosed knife-wound lashed across his right eye and part of his cheek, and the blood had dried without any attempt to wash it away. Then there was a little gnome about five feet high and 80 years old, who cackled; a middleaged tribesmen [sic] in a bloodstained burnoose, with the flashing eyes of the zealot; and a half-naked monkey-man in a string of red and blue beads who claimed to be a local ‘faquir’.⁵

Margaret Parton offered her mother a theory about why the tribesmen’s invasion failed—because of the indiscipline of those members of the lashkar intent on loot. So ‘the buses which were to sweep them into Srinagar on Id day . . . were commande[e]red instead by the looting group, and loaded with the stolen goods of the poor Kashmiris, sent off in the opposite direction’. But for this, Parton asserted, the invaders ‘might have made it, and having seized the capital city, claimed Kashmir



for Pakistan. But by the time their buses came back and the looters reassembled into something like an army, enough Indian troops had arrived to stop them cold.' She added, somewhat prophetically: 'I think they'll try again—but I don't know when.'

Snippets of information from the interrogation of captured tribesmen and their sympathisers were passed on to the Indian press, and recycled in subsequent Indian official documents.⁶ They can hardly be deemed reliable, because prisoners would have been tempted to tell their captors what they thought they wanted to hear, and in any event the Indian authorities were hardly likely to make public any information that didn't suit their purpose. Much of their tone was about the connivance of the leaders of the invasion in looting and rape, and the involvement in the operation of the Pakistani authorities and their army and police officers.

Colonel Harbakhsh Singh was involved in mopping-up operations after the raiders' retreat. 'They ran like hell out of the Valley,' he told me. 'Once they were defeated, they ran.' The advancing Indian troops captured the raiders' vehicles, their suitcases and kit bags, even letters and personal documents—containing, Harbakhsh Singh insisted, evidence of the involvement of officers in the newly created Pakistan army. 'Whoever we caught, they said: leave certificate, we are on leave. Pakistanis would say: we're spending our holidays here in Kashmir, we've come to spend our holidays.' Decades later, Harbakhsh Singh still chortled at the memory of Pakistan army officers in civilian clothes coming to fight in Kashmir during their holidays. Unlikely as this may seem, a scheme to give leave to any Pakistani officers deployed to assist the invaders was one of the points agreed on at the Pakistan leadership's crisis conference on Kashmir two days after the start of the Indian airlift.

Sheikh Abdullah played the raiders card to seek to entrench his political dominance. 'These lovers of Pakistan dishonoured even the Holy Quoran and desecrated our mosques which they turned into brothels to satisfy their animal lust with abducted women,' he declared just ten days after Indian troops entered Baramulla.

In the name of every Kashmiri I ask the Pir of Manki Sharif to search his conscience as the head of the invaders. We have beaten back these traitors to Islam. God-fearing Kashmiris are reluctant even to touch the bodies of these invaders which are strewn on the battlefields for a burial.

As to traitors to their country, the fifth columnists, people's justice will follow swift and sure.⁷

There was some settling of scores as the invaders were repulsed. A few of the raiders' local supporters joined the retreat. Some alleged sympathisers, among them Baramulla's deputy commissioner Chaudhri Faizullah Khan were arrested. He had, it was said, 'rendered assistance to the invaders', and probably as damning, his brother was the acting president of the National Conference's main rival, the pro-Pakistan Muslim Conference.⁸ His statement of evidence was later published by the Indian authorities. 'It is estimated about 5,000 [raiders] were concentrated in Baramula at one time,' he apparently asserted. 'They were mostly tribesmen with a few Punjab Muslims, and well armed and led by Pirs, Pak Army and Frontier Constabulary officers The local Muslim Conference men joined with the raiders and acted as guides and helped them to collect weapons.' The inhabitants of the town, he declared, had 'suffered terrible hardships It was a great relief to the inhabitants when the Indian Army re-captured Baramula.'⁹

Gradually, a semblance of normal life returned to the Kashmir Valley. 'Srinagar Gay Again After Days of Panic', ran a headline in the *New York Times* on a story datelined 14 November 1947. The taking of Mahura, a village on the Jhelum river between Baramulla and Uri, allowed staff to return to work at the hydroelectric plant there, and repairs to be made. Little more than a week later, the power supply was partially restored, and Srinagar, or at least parts of the city, had electricity for the first time in almost a month.¹⁰ But the lashkar had been repulsed, not vanquished. When the Indian army captured Uri, nowadays the last town of any consequence on the Indian side of the line of control, it gave up the chase. The retreating invaders were not pursued down the narrowing Jhelum Valley towards Domel and Muzaffarabad. It's a decision that courted intense controversy at the time, and still rankles among Indian veterans of the conflict.

Brigadier Bogey Sen recalled how on 14 November he was summoned back from the front line to Srinagar, and was told by his new commanding officer General Kulwant Singh not to press on down the Valley, but to head south from Uri over a precarious mountain pass to relieve the beleaguered town of Poonch. 'This order took me completely by surprise,' he wrote. 'I explained to Major General Kulwant Singh that I had the enemy on the run, and unless I kept up the pressure he would recover and come back, and instead of our attacking him we would be attacked. I suggested that I be given additional troops and be permitted to continue the advance on the existing axis This suggestion, however, was not accepted, and I was informed by Major General Kulwant Singh that he



was not interested in moving towards Domel, but was interested in reinforcing Poonch which was under enemy pressure.¹¹ Six days later, after a series of stormy exchanges between the force commander and his brigade commander, Brigadier Sen's troops started moving south over the Haji Pir pass, and out of the Kashmir Valley, somewhat encumbered by being mistaken as raiders by a remnant of the Jammu and Kashmir state forces who promptly burnt down an important wooden bridge over a ravine. The abrupt left-turn of the Indian troops took the heat off the retreating tribal forces, and left the strategically situated town of Uri vulnerable to counter-attack.

There were good operational reasons for the Indian army to train its guns in and around Poonch. Its troops faced a more robust adversary in this westerly part of Jammu province, where the insurgency was conducted in large part by local men with considerable military experience (the highly reputed Poonchis, who had served with distinction in the British Indian army) and with substantial local support. There was also a big non-Muslim population in the town of Poonch and adjoining areas, giving rise to fears of heavy loss of civilian lives without forceful military intervention. More than that, advancing on Muzaffarabad and along the Rawalpindi road risked stretching lines of communication, and brought with it a greater risk of full-scale war with Pakistan. The Indian government may well have thought it better, having pushed the raiders out of the Kashmir Valley, to seek to defend what they had secured rather than advance further and risk overextending troops and resources.

Brigadier Sen's supporters have often alleged that the order to divert to Poonch either came from the maharaja, concerned about the well-being of one of his relatives, or from Delhi—and that Jawaharlal Nehru, had political reasons for wanting to restrain his troops as they advanced down the Rawalpindi road. In fact, Nehru appears to have been facing both ways on this issue, expostulating at one meeting of the cabinet defence committee that 'he could not understand why [the] Indian Army had stopped at Uri rather than going on to Domel and even Kohala,' and a few days later telling this same committee that Poonch 'must be held at all costs'.¹² The brigadier's detractors, foremost among them his then deputy Harbakhsh Singh, have accused Sen of 'military incompetence', suggesting that if he had not paused at Uri but pressed on along the Jhelum, 'the Raiders would not have got an opportunity to rally round as they did. Nor would the regular Pakistani army have been able to cross the river [at Domel]. In fact we would not have had a Kashmir problem at all!'¹³ There's a touch of bombast in such assertions. Yet whatever the reason,



the failure of Indian troops to continue the advance down the Jhelum Valley allowed the remnants of the retreating lashkar to regroup, re-equip themselves, and return to the battle.

The account of Akbar Khan, one of the Pakistani architects of the invasion of Kashmir, of his role in restoring a semblance of morale and organisation to a disintegrating tribal army was no doubt self-serving, but the raiders certainly managed to raise their standard again and proved to be a considerable adversary for the Indian army. Akbar Khan had travelled back to Rawalpindi at the end of October in an unsuccessful effort to persuade the authorities to provide armoured cars to the lashkar. By the time he was ready to head once more towards Kashmir, the raiders had staged, in his words, 'a total disappearance'. Pakistan's army still would not openly intervene—*Dawn* was reporting Pakistan ministry of defence statements insisting that there was 'absolutely no truth' in reports that Pakistan army officers were directing operations in Kashmir—'yet the show was to go on at all costs'.¹⁴ At about the same time, Khurshid Anwar, the nearest the lashkar had to a commander, was injured in the leg by a bomb splinter somewhere near Uri—he said this was on 10 November, two days after Indian troops entered Baramulla—and was evacuated to Abbottabad. In hospital in Karachi the following month, he told the Muslim League newspaper that 'Colonel Akbar' had taken over command.¹⁵

Akbar Khan, by his own account, helped the remnants of the raiders stage a fighting withdrawal beyond Uri. Initially, his endeavours to infuse discipline and purpose in the retreating and demoralised ranks of the tribal forces met with little success. Khan, a Pathan, discovered his own elder brother among the raiders at Uri, but still couldn't persuade the retreating lashkar to stay and fight. 'My mission had ended in complete failure,' he lamented. But a few days later, about 13 November, he managed to gather a force at Chakothei, fifteen miles beyond Uri—and nowadays the last settlement on Pakistan's side of the line of control—and over the following days, reinforcements arrived. Some tribesmen 'wanted a chance to make good', and by the end of November there was a fighting force of some strength. A British diplomat C.B. Duke visited Abbottabad at about this time and found about 2,000 armed men there intent on fighting in Kashmir, though he commented that it was 'difficult to get any accurate estimate of the numbers of tribesmen involved . . . as they come and go largely according to their own feelings':

In Abbottabad the tribesmen were conspicuous with their rifles over their shoulders, girt with bandoliers and lookingly thoroughly





piratical. But I was given to understand that they are less of a nuisance than they were, as the buildings of the former Government Stud Farm, some 3 miles outside of Abbottabad itself, had been made over to them for use as a transit camp, and from there they go up the road in the evenings so as to move in Kashmir itself under the cover of darkness to avoid the attentions of Indian aircraft, which the tribesmen said did damage, but principally to the Kashmiris themselves in their villages and fields.

I drove out to Garhi Habibullah, the last village on this side of the Kashmir border . . . In spite of general sympathy with the object of helping the Muslims of Kashmir, all those who had come into contact with the tribesmen were thoroughly sick of them, though not less frightened of them, calling them wolves—rapacious, quarrelsome and dangerous.¹⁶

The diplomat reported that Mahsuds were the dominant component of the tribal forces, but that Afridis, Mohmands, Wazirs, migratory Afghan tribes and others were also present.

In early December, Akbar Khan recalled that he was summoned to Rawalpindi to meet Pakistan's prime minister. And with the alleged connivance of Pakistan's British commander-in-chief General Messervy, the raiders were allocated a million rounds of ammunition and the service of twelve volunteer officers from the Pakistan army for three weeks.¹⁷ At the same time, it seems the Pakistan authorities were restricting the flow of tribal fighters towards Kashmir—one report from Peshawar in late November relayed word that in the previous three weeks, about 7,000 armed tribesmen making for Kashmir had been stopped and turned back.¹⁸ Whatever support was being provided to the lashkar was half-hearted. But the Pakistani leadership was determined to keep alive the issue of Kashmir's status, and to avoid an Indian military advance along the Rawalpindi road. They had little option but surreptitiously to build up the effectiveness of the armed forces already in the field. By doing so, they ensured that as winter set in, Indian troops were unable to extend their control much beyond the town of Uri. That in turn set the parameters for the informal partition of the former princely state.

Indian commanders certainly noticed the new resolve and battle readiness of the lashkar and its allies. 'During the first week of December,' wrote Brigadier Sen, 'the tactics employed by the enemy underwent a radical change. The battle formations adopted made it obvious that the enemy was composed not solely of tribesmen, but included a percentage



of either regular or irregular troops.¹⁹ The following week witnessed the most bruising battle for the Indian army to date, on the mountain tracks radiating out from Uri. The First Battalion of the Sikh Regiment was now responsible for that area. On 12 or 13 December, an army contingent seeking to dislodge raiders who were threatening the security of some of the roads and passes found itself hemmed in on three sides. It appeared to have been a well-planned ambush. According to the official Indian account, sixty of its troops were killed and at least as many injured—a grievous blow. The Indian regiment that spearheaded the Kashmir operation lost more men in a matter of hours in that encounter outside Uri than it had in the previous seven weeks of at times heavy fighting.²⁰ The First Sikhs were promptly pulled back to Srinagar and put on garrison duty, and they spent the next six weeks recuperating, reorganising and undergoing training.

On other fronts, the ebb and flow of the conflict was uneven. Pakistan gained control of Gilgit in the north-west of the former princely state without much of a fight. The maharaja's rule over this remote area had only recently been restored after a period of lease to British India (this was 'great game' territory, close to the Soviet Union, China and Afghanistan, sparsely populated but seen as of strategic importance), and the Dogra monarchy's claim to and grip on the region was weak. It was a young Scottish officer who had recently been transferred into the service of the maharaja, Willie Brown, who took it upon himself to deliver Gilgit to Pakistan, with the support, or at least the acquiescence, of the troops he commanded, the Gilgit Scouts. There was certainly little sign of local enthusiasm for Indian rule, and every indication of mounting unrest. Brown organised a quiet coup, placing the maharaja's governor under house arrest, and sidestepping local sentiment in favour of self-rule. 'Who is Major William Brown?' a British official enquired with some exasperation. By then, the Pakistan flag was flying in Muslim-majority Gilgit and its fate was sealed. Colonel Aslam Khan, one of Khurshid Anwar's officers during the lashkar's initial venture into Kashmir and a veteran of the Baramulla debacle, took over command of the Gilgit Scouts in January 1948. In the ensuing months, the Gilgit Scouts, after quite a tussle, also managed to bring neighbouring Baltistan into Pakistan's orbit, and came close to prising Ladakh away from Indian rule.²¹

In addition to the conflict about Kashmir's status, Jammu province in the south-west of the former princely state had witnessed acute communal tension, heavy loss of life and huge movement of refugees. The extent of the killing in Jammu province is difficult to ascertain.



There were at the time and afterwards allegations of massacres of Muslims in and around Jammu by the maharaja's forces and by armed Hindu and Sikh groups. These reports greatly inflamed tension, and encouraged the Pathan tribesmen and others in Pakistan to take up arms to save Muslim lives. The figure has been cited of 200,000 casualties in Jammu province in the closing months of 1947. An exhaustive study of census and other data has concluded that it is 'impossible to determine' if there was a massacre of Muslims.²² Thousands of people were certainly killed on both sides, and there is evidence that a large number of Muslims died in targeted attacks, particularly in early November just as fighting was taking place further north for control of Srinagar. The profound anxiety this caused in Jammu province, as well as the impact of the carnage in Punjab, added to the hundreds of thousands of refugees of all three communities who moved across the new international border near Jammu or traversed the malleable front line of the fighting.²³

On the battlefield in Jammu province, there was no Gilgit-style walkover for the Pakistan forces. The longevity of the battle in the more southerly parts of the war front, and the greater relative preponderance there of military veterans (either of the British Indian army or of the Kashmir state forces or indeed of the Japan-aligned Indian National Army of Subash Chandra Bose) as opposed to tribal forces, allowed the introduction of more conventional military organisation. Pakistan's Azad Kashmir Regiment has claimed 'the unique distinction of being the only Regiment of the Pakistan Army that raised itself in the battlefield to fight for the freedom of its homeland'.²⁴ It traces its history back to the first shots fired in the Poonch rebellion. Its political line of command was far from clear—notionally the provisional Azad Kashmir government was in charge, but not in any real sense.

Regimental histories are not the best source of unimpeachable information. The history of the Azad Kashmir Regiment is perhaps overstating the fact to suggest there was a command structure in each sector in place by early November 1947. Indeed, the acidic Akbar Khan related how in the Poonch area there were two rival commanders, who kept leapfrogging each other in giving themselves ever more exalted military ranks. In this sector of the front, however, local opinion rallied strongly behind the Pakistan forces. Some of the towns closest to Pakistan Punjab such as Mirpur were quickly taken over by the Azad Kashmir forces, as was much of the countryside around Poonch. But after that initial claiming of territory, it was a keenly fought battle for land and for control of the few towns of any size.

In the southern front, stretching from Mirpur north to Poonch and beyond, there was at least the makings of a centralised military command. At the helm of the pro-Pakistan forces was Brigadier Muhammed Zaman Kiani, who had been involved in planning for the Kashmir operation from an early stage. He was a veteran of the Indian National Army, and had apparently seen active service alongside the Japanese in north-east India during the Second World War. The regimental history names another INA veteran, Colonel Habib-ur-Rehman, as his initial deputy. Of the eleven other sector and senior commanders listed in this account, five were identified as INA veterans, and two others as former officers in the Jammu and Kashmir state forces—the remainder (and indeed most of the INA fighters before they changed side) had probably served with the pre-independence Indian army. The contribution of former INA officers is striking. They provided some of the military acumen that was so vital, and which the Pakistan army, still being assembled in the aftermath of Partition, was not permitted to provide, at least not openly.

The somewhat haphazard recruitment of officers of the Azad Kashmir forces was evident in the remarkable story of Russell K. Haight, an American soldier and adventurer who helped lead the raiders on the Poonch and Kotli fronts. He was a twenty-five-year-old US war veteran from New York who spent two months as, by his own account, a ‘brigadier general’ with the insurgents. It seems that Haight, a former US army sergeant, had been working in Afghanistan for a construction company, suffered an injury, and was in Rawalpindi in November on his way back to the United States when he fell in with leaders of the Azad Kashmir forces. ‘I was to be sent back to Denver,’ he reminisced many years later, ‘but got off the train in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. I met a newspaper man . . . who in turn introduced me to Sardar Mohammed Ibrahim Khan. He offered me a captaincy in the Azad Kashmir forces and I accepted.’²⁵ When Haight’s wife, Doris, back at home in Colorado looking after a one-year-old baby, heard of his bravado, she commented ruefully: ‘Russell is impulsive and full of energy . . . It didn’t surprise me when they said he was fighting in India.’ Haight’s family still has a typed note sent to ‘Captain R.K. Haight, (on Field)’ at the end of November 1947 from the ‘Azad Kashmir Government H.Q. C/O General Post Office Rawalpindi’.²⁶

The news reporter that Haight met in Rawalpindi was Sydney Smith of the *Daily Express*, recently arrived in the city after his evacuation from Baramulla and again on the lookout for scoops. He manufactured one from Haight’s enlistment in the Azad Kashmir forces, and filed a front-page story from Rawalpindi (Haight’s wife was English, which

made the story even better for the *Express*) before the ‘ex-commando’ had even reached the front line. ‘Wearing a ten-gallon cowboy hat, bright blue overalls, and high yellow boots, the first white man to join the invading tribesmen went into action tonight against the Indian Dominion troops in Kashmir,’ filed Smith. He even had an excitedly naïve quote from Haight: ‘I’m tickled to death to get into this little war. I threw up a road-building job in Afghanistan to show the Kashmiris the Commando fighting we learned in England.’²⁷

When Robert Trumbull of the *New York Times* met up with Haight in Lahore a few weeks later, the Stetson had been replaced by an ‘eighteen-foot Poonchi turban’ and the overalls had made way for a jungle-green uniform with Azad Kashmir insignia in Urdu. But by then Haight’s ‘little war’ was over, and he was heading out of Pakistan in fear of his life. There had been, Haight said, several attempts to kill him, and Trumbull—no doubt getting every last drop of drama out of the story—explained that he sat on the interview for twelve days until he received a coded telegram from Haight that he was about to leave the country. ‘He learned how to handle unruly tribesmen—who were interested mainly in loot—by playing upon their vanities and tribal rivalries,’ Trumbull reported, ‘but he decided to quit when he was unable to obtain either the supplies or the cooperation necessary for the tasks he was asked to do.’

Russell Haight fell foul of various different factions in the conflict, and had to beat a hasty retreat. ‘When fighting in Jhelum,’ he recalled towards the end of his life, ‘we had two workable machine guns we had recovered from a downed Indian Airforce plane. Three Pathan tribesmen tried to take them so we had to kill them. I escaped with a truck and a driver and the two machine guns.’ Haight was not well versed in the political sensitivities of the region, but he told Robert Trumbull that the Pakistani authorities had played a critical role in sustaining the military operation.

Mr Haight said gasoline—a scarce and strictly rationed commodity—was supplied plentifully to the raiders by the Pakistan authorities.

Mr Haight also found Pakistan Army personnel running the Azad Kashmir radio station, relaying messages through their own Pakistan Army receivers, organizing and managing Azad encampments in Pakistan, and supplying uniforms, food, arms and ammunition which, he understood, came from Pakistan Army stores through such subterfuges as the ‘loss’ of ammunition shipments.

Although he insisted that the Kashmir fighting broke out in rebellion against atrocities committed upon Moslems by the Hindu Maharajah's Dogra troops, Mr Haight characterized the Azad Kashmir Provisional Government . . . as 'Pakistan puppets'. He also deeply implicated high Pakistan Government officials, notably the Premier of the North-West Frontier Province.²⁸

Some of the strength of Haight's testimony is diminished by his insistence on circumstantial evidence that Russia was also supplying weaponry, and that scores of Communists (particularly in the distinctly obscure Kashmir Freedom League, of which he said 'there wasn't an honest-to-God Moslem in the bunch') were actively supporting the raiders. This fitted the increasingly chilly cold war mood much more than it seems to have fitted the facts. It may, however, have helped him get the attention of the US state department, which eventually arranged his passage home.²⁹ A British diplomat who met 'Brigadier Haight' shortly before he left Pakistan, found him to be 'quite clearly scared . . . while he was prepared for small scale fighting, he had no desire to be mixed up in a larger war'. The diplomat went on to report that Haight 'had taken on night time employment with a small time European crook in a gambling den, and hoped to get enough money to make a secret departure to Karachi and throw himself at the mercies of the USA consul there'.³⁰

The British diplomat sought to get Haight to estimate the strength of the lashkar and other Azad Kashmir forces. Haight's 'vaguest guess' was that there were 15,000 tribal fighters in Jammu and Kashmir, with a similar number coming and going and dispersed along the border. 'He also said there were a fair number of Pakistan officers on leave in Kashmir.' It is impossible to reach any authoritative estimate on the size of the armed contingents trying to fend off Indian rule in Kashmir. Sir George Cunningham, from his vantage point of the governor's residence in Peshawar, kept count as best he could. As the threat to Srinagar was at its height, Cunningham estimated that about 7,000 Pathan tribesmen—chiefly, in his view, Mahsuds, Afridis and Mohmands—were involved in the operation.³¹ This is probably the most reliable and disinterested figure for the size of the lashkar at its peak, and broadly fits with the independent estimates of two reporters on the spot, Alan Moorehead and Sydney Smith, that the lashkar had a fighting force of about 10,000. But given the constant ebb and flow of the tribal forces, the number who at one time or other fought in Kashmir would, as Russell Haight suggested,



have been substantially higher. Cunningham's estimate appears not to take into account the forces on the southern front, around Poonch, where there were tribal contingents, but probably as great a number of local men and of armed sympathisers from both Punjab and the Frontier Province. The scale of India's military deployment in the former princely state is also difficult to decipher—one knowledgeable military historian has suggested that by mid-November, India had more than 11,000 troops in the Kashmir Valley, and by the following May, was deploying 14,000 troops on the front line and to secure lines of communication.³² It is likely, in other words, that no side had an overwhelming advantage in terms of numbers deployed—though the Indian troops were certainly better equipped and organised.

In tandem with the fighting for Kashmir, a diplomatic war was being waged by India and Pakistan for control of the Valley. Nehru fired the first substantial salvo, and in so doing directed India's policy along a course which Delhi has spent decades trying to undo. He sought to internationalise the Kashmir issue and made pledges which, as Pakistan has persistently reminded the world, India has not fulfilled.

On Sunday, 2 November 1947—six days after the start of India's military airlift to Kashmir—Nehru broadcast to the nation. 'I want to speak to you tonight about Kashmir,' he began, 'not about the beauty of that famous Valley, but about the horror which it has had to face recently.' He related the background to India's military intervention, and alleged Pakistan's culpability in failing to stop the raiders. He made two clear statements—that India's military presence in Kashmir would not be indefinite, and that Kashmiris would have a referendum to determine their future. 'It must be remembered . . . that the struggle in Kashmir is a struggle of the people of Kashmir under popular leadership against the invader,' he asserted. 'Our troops are there to help in this struggle, and as soon as Kashmir is free from the invader, our troops will have no further necessity to remain there and the fate of Kashmir will be left in the hands of the people of Kashmir.' He then put flesh on the bare bones of Mountbatten's commitment, in accepting Kashmir's accession to India, to allow the people of the princely state to decide on its status when circumstances allowed.

We have declared that the fate of Kashmir is ultimately to be decided by the people. That pledge we have given, and the Maharaja has supported it, not only to the people of Kashmir but to the world. We will not, and cannot back out of it. We are prepared when peace



and law and order have been established to have a referendum held under international auspices like the United Nations. We want it to be a fair and just reference to the people, and we shall accept their verdict. I can imagine no fairer and juster offer.

Meanwhile we have given our word to the people of Kashmir to protect them against the invader and we shall keep our pledge.³³

It was a key statement of Indian policy. ‘Plebiscite under U.N. Auspices/Pandit Nehru’s Pledge On Kashmir Issue’, ran the lead headline in the *Times of India* the next morning. Nehru’s words were unambiguous—a commitment to the international community that there would be a referendum held under the auspices of the UN or some other international body. Within a week, Nehru had put a three-point proposal to his Pakistani counterpart: that Pakistan should publicly do its utmost to compel the raiders to withdraw from Kashmir; that India would repeat its intention to pull troops out of Kashmiri soil once the raiders had withdrawn and law and order had been restored; and ‘that the Governments of India and Pakistan should make a joint request to U.N.O. [the United Nations Organisation] to undertake a plebiscite in Kashmir at the earliest possible date’. The idea of a referendum to decide on the Partition line had been tried, and worked, elsewhere. There had been popular votes in the North West Frontier Province and in the Sylhet district of Assam in July 1947, both turning out to Pakistan’s advantage. And a vote had also been mooted to settle Junagadh’s status. None of these polls, of course, had been conducted under UN supervision.

No sooner were Nehru’s words uttered than his allies in Kashmir were trying to damp down expectations of an early vote. When Nehru visited Srinagar nine days after his broadcast, Sheikh Abdullah took the opportunity to pour a bucket of cold water over talk of an early plebiscite. ‘There may not be a referendum at all after this disaster at Baramula, Uri, Pattan and Muzaffarabad and other places,’ he reportedly told journalists over dinner. ‘After what happened in these places, the people of Kashmir may not bother about a referendum.’ A few days later, his deputy Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad commented that the ‘people of Kashmir are more likely to be asked to ratify the provisional decision to accede to India at the general elections than to vote in a referendum to decide the future of the State, in the light of atrocities committed by the raiders.’³⁴ It’s difficult to establish whether this was excited political rhetoric or a reflection of the difficulties of organising a referendum in a troubled region with no history of popular elections, or a sign of lack of confidence that India



could win a vote. Most likely, it was a rather brittle assertion by Sheikh Abdullah and his National Conference that, after a matter of days in power, they did not intend to offer to relinquish their much sought after new positions and authority. Pakistan may, in a sense, have unintentionally propelled Sheikh Abdullah to power, but he was not minded to give Pakistan the chance of evicting him from office quite so quickly.

At the same time, Pakistan's leadership, which had initially been unenthusiastic about reference to the United Nations, warmed to the idea of a role for the still new and untested international body. 'We are ready to request U.N.O. . . . to set up an impartial administration of the State till a plebiscite is held,' Pakistan's prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, stated on 16 November, 'and to undertake the plebiscite under its direction and control for the purpose of ascertaining the free and unfettered will of the people of the State on the question of accession.' Pakistan's suggestion that the UN take responsibility for governing the state, in place of Sheikh Abdullah, was not what India had in mind. The tension between the neighbouring dominions had been intensified by India's takeover of the princely state of Junagadh in mid-November. All three disputed states to which Pakistan had an arguable claim—the third was Hyderabad in the south—appeared to be slipping from its grip. Both Nehru and Liaquat Ali Khan were at various times unwell during the early weeks of the Kashmir crisis, and plans for a face-to-face meeting in the crucial initial stages of the conflict were not realised. The two prime ministers met twice in the first week of December, at sessions of the joint defence council, but not in an atmosphere conducive to anything other than a repetition of stated views.³⁵

On New Year's Day 1948, India formally put the Kashmir issue before the United Nations, complaining of 'the aid which invaders, consisting of nationals of Pakistan and of tribesmen . . . are drawing from Pakistan', and describing this as an 'act of aggression against India'. This was the beginning of a tortuous UN involvement in the Kashmir issue—at least eighteen Security Council resolutions in the following quarter of a century, one of the longest lasting and least successful UN military missions, a lot of hand-wringing and little achievement. From the start, the United Nations served as a forum for putting the Kashmir issue under a magnifying glass. India wanted to focus on what it described as Pakistan's aggression. Pakistan succeeded in broadening the issue to that of the process of accession, the rival claims to Kashmir, and—harking on Mountbatten's and Nehru's public commitments—the need to establish the will of the people of Kashmir (while at the same time blocking off the option of

independence). Sheikh Abdullah was among those who presented India's case to the UN Security Council in the initial debates. The consensus has always been that Pakistan was more effective at this stage in making use of the United Nations as a forum and in arguing its corner.

In January 1948, the United Nations Security Council passed two quick resolutions—numbers 38 and 39, a reminder of just how young and raw the UN was at that time—urging that the two countries do nothing that might 'aggravate' the conflict, and establishing a UN commission. A further resolution in April expanded the size and defined the remit of the commission and proposed measures 'to bring about a cessation of the fighting and to create proper conditions for a free and impartial plebiscite to decide whether the State of Jammu and Kashmir is to accede to India or Pakistan.'³⁶ The Indian government was deeply unhappy that Pakistan had not been named as the aggressor. Its reference of the Kashmir issue to the UN had not gone as Delhi had planned, and now the focus of international attention was not on Pakistan's complicity in an invasion of what had become Indian territory, but on the strength of the competing claims to Kashmir and how they could be resolved by a referendum. Karachi was also uneasy, because the terms of the resolution appeared to suggest that all Pakistani fighters from outside Kashmir—in other words, most of them—should be required to leave the former princely state. The only Kashmiri leader who could make any real noise about the damping down of any option of independence, Sheikh Abdullah, chose not to—at least, not at this stage.

A five-nation UN Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) eventually arrived in the region in early July. Josef Korbel was the Czechoslovak member until replaced by his government the following year. Korbel's subsequent account both of the UN's laborious and largely ineffective intervention, and of the underlying crisis, revealed his grave concern over Soviet involvement in Kashmir. It was entitled *Danger in Kashmir*, and the danger he had in mind was Moscow-aligned communism. Writing in the 1950s with the cold war at its height, Korbel gave expression 'to the possibility that Kashmir might eventually become a hub of Communist activities in Southern Asia'. What's more, he saw in the left-leaning National Conference administration in Indian Kashmir, and its leader Sheikh Abdullah ('an opportunist and, worse, a dictator'), indications of communist allegiances. 'Kashmir is on the road to a radical left-wing totalitarian dictatorship,' Korbel declared.³⁷

The 'New Kashmir' manifesto that the National Conference had adopted in 1944 gave some credence to concerns about the party's



communist affinities. It had been written mainly by a Punjabi communist B.P.L. Bedi, though it is not clear whether he was acting on behalf of the party or on his own initiative. (One of Bedi's comrades at the time Pran Nath Jalali recalled that there wasn't much writing to be done, as most of the document was lifted from a Soviet publication). In the introduction, Sheikh Abdullah applauded that 'Soviet Russia has demonstrated before our eyes, not merely theoretically but in her actual day to day life and development, that real freedom takes birth only from economic emancipation.' He wanted the same for New Kashmir. Indeed, the manifesto set out proposals which it described as 'in worthy participation of the historic resurgence of the peoples of the East, and the working masses of the world, and in determination to make this our country a dazzling gem upon the snowy bosom of Asia'. Moving from abstract rhetoric to practicalities, the anti-landlord policy of 'land to the tiller' also cast Sheikh Abdullah's party as determinedly socialist. Sheikh Abdullah's precipitate renaming on taking power of the main square in Srinagar as Red Square (Lal Chowk) was pointed to as clinching evidence of Soviet sympathies. In his initial months in power, he relied greatly on Bedi and a handful of left-wing advisers. The small number of communists in Srinagar were active and disproportionately influential within the National Conference, and its trade union and students' movements. There had been a long history to fears of Russian, and then Soviet, involvement in Kashmir.³⁸ Suffice it to say that however looming and urgent these concerns once seemed of Moscow's ambitions in Kashmir, it never became a hub of communism, and while the National Conference's radicalism saw through the introduction of far-reaching land reform it ebbed markedly over the years.

By the time Josef Korbelt and his colleagues on the UN Commission for India and Pakistan embarked on their deliberations, attempts to stop the Kashmir dispute sliding into open war were already too late. Their first stop was Karachi. Jinnah was too ill to meet the commission, and died two months later. The prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, hosted a courtesy call, during which he never mentioned Kashmir. But Pakistan's foreign minister Sir Zafrullah Khan was more forthright, giving the commission's members a three-hour briefing on the background to the Kashmir issue. 'Then came the first bombshell,' Korbelt recorded. Zafrullah Khan 'informed the Commission that three Pakistani brigades had been on Kashmir territory since May'. The Pakistan government excused the deployment as an act of self-defence in response to an Indian army offensive.³⁹ The commission members immediately recognised that 'the

presence of the Pakistani troops in Kashmir made of the situation something far graver and far more disturbing' than had been apparent when they were despatched on their mission.

The Kashmiri winter had seen some sporadic fighting on the edges of the Valley. Indian troops had clawed back control of some strategic points, and had seen off what they regarded as a serious advance by raiders and their allies in the February dead of winter. Indian generals planned for a spring offensive. The aim was to capture Domel, the location of the strategic bridge adjoining the town of Muzaffarabad, and in May troops sought to advance along the Jhelum Valley road, with flanking operations to the south and more forcefully to the north.⁴⁰ There was also military activity on the Jammu front, with Indian troops capturing the key town of Rajouri near Poonch in April 1948. The Indian army achieved other successes on both fronts, but their progress was slow, and this was certainly not a hell-for-leather advance towards Pakistan's main population centres. It was sufficiently alarming for Pakistan's armed forces, however, for them to take the step that they had held back from seven months earlier, and deploy units of the Pakistan army to fight Indian troops in Kashmir. The façade of limited political and logistical support for the anti-India forces in Kashmir was dropped, and Pakistan committed key units of its army on the front line. This was war, albeit undeclared.

The call to deploy in Kashmir was issued by the same British officer, General Douglas Gracey—by now Pakistan's commander-in-chief—who the previous October had refused to act on Jinnah's order to mobilise troops and advance into the Kashmir Valley. As early as 20 April 1948, Gracey reported to his government the potential consequences of an Indian army general offensive which he expected to start 'very soon now':

If Pakistan is not to face another serious refugee problem with about 2,750,000 people uprooted from their homes; if India is not to be allowed to sit on the doorsteps of Pakistan to the rear and on the flank at liberty to enter at its will and pleasure; if the civilian and military morale is not to be affected to a dangerous extent; and if subversive political forces are not to be encouraged and let loose within Pakistan itself, it is imperative that the Indian Army is not allowed to advance beyond the general line Uri-Poonch-Naoshera.⁴¹

The advice was taken. At the beginning of May, Britain's high commissioner to Pakistan reported back to London that units of the Pakistan army were fighting in Kashmir. The British government managed



to stop this information becoming public. And the UN commission was taken by surprise when the Pakistan government for the first time acknowledged its military intervention in Kashmir two months later.

This escalation of the conflict did not entail the spread of fighting beyond the former princely state. Unlike later wars, the first India–Pakistan war was restricted to one main theatre of operations, in Jammu and Kashmir. And in spite of earlier threats, the British government did not pull out the remaining officers in the Indian and Pakistan armed forces. The order that they should not be involved in the fighting in Kashmir remained in place, but they were not forced to stand down. This was distinctly to Pakistan’s advantage. In 1948, there were still an estimated 800 British officers in Pakistan’s forces. By contrast, the Indian army had pursued a policy of promoting its nationals, and only 350 British officers remained, almost all serving in advisory or technical posts.⁴² The Indian government complained vigorously that British officers, even if not fighting, were assisting and helping to organise Pakistan’s war effort. Their representations would have been still more insistent if they had known that a handful of British officers were commanding Pakistani troops in Kashmir.

The regimental newsletters of veterans of the British Indian army, now fallen silent as their members diminish in number, are replete with stories and anecdotes which supplement the official accounts of military deployments. For almost forty years, Lt Col. Patric Emerson was the secretary of the Indian Army Association, and for much of that time published its newsletter. He had served as an officer in the pre-independence Indian army for ten years at the time of Partition, when he opted for Pakistan and served there a further couple of years. In late 1947 and through the following year, he was a battalion commander based at Sialkot, just across the new international border from the Indian city of Jammu. As with almost all British officers, he knew nothing about the plans for the tribesmen’s invasion of the princely state, or the support being given to the Azad Kashmir forces. ‘I hadn’t a clue,’ he told me. ‘One day, I was told that if I got on my motorbike and went ten miles or so up along the border, I would see some of the Pathans coming back with their loot. So I got on my bike and sat at a respectful distance away, and I could see this long line of Pathans with all sorts of swag over their shoulder, all disappearing into the distance. But that’s all I ever saw of it.’

Even when Pakistan deployed its troops in strength in Kashmir, he remained at base. But Patric Emerson’s newsletter, and other veterans’ publications, have carried accounts of British officers who, rather than



allow the troops they commanded to advance into action without them, followed on and fought for Pakistan in Kashmir. 'I think in most cases it was because their soldiers were going in, and they had always fought with their soldiers—so they would jolly well go with them,' Emerson commented. 'I don't think many people thought very much about what the consequences of Kashmir would be, or what the future of it would be. It's just their men were going in, so I'm going in with them.'

One of these hidden veterans of the conflict, J.H. Harvey-Kelly, ventured twice into Kashmir. On the first occasion, in January 1948, his mission was to find and bring back Pakistani troops under his command who had headed off with an arsenal of weapons and mortars to help the Kashmir operation. The second time around, in the early summer of 1948, he was not restraining his men but leading them from their base in Abbottabad into battle against Indian troops. Harvey-Kelly recalled that he was summoned to the hill town of Murree to meet one of the instigators of Pakistan's Kashmir operation, Akbar Khan.

Akbar's first question was 'Are you a volunteer?' The puzzlement must have shown on my face, for he went on, 'I shall quite understand if you don't want to go to Kashmir'. I immediately assured him that there was nothing I would like better, and if commanding my battalion in Kashmir meant being a volunteer, I most certainly was one. 'That's fine' he said 'we must give you a code name. How about Iqbal?' I was flattered as Sir Mohammed Iqbal had been a distinguished Punjabi poet . . . I liked Brigadier Akbar and was amused at his way of speaking, which seemed to me very Irish. He had race horses training in Ireland and his Begum was a well-known political figure.

Harvey-Kelly commanded his troops as they prepared, with eventual success, to capture the strategic location of Pandu, a hill north of the river Jhelum and overlooking Chakothei. His soldiers sported neither regimental badges nor identity discs, for it seems they were deployed before Pakistan had announced that it was sending regular troops to Kashmir. Harvey-Kelly himself wore no uniform and grew a beard 'as there seemed no point in making my presence with the battalion unnecessarily obvious to outside observers'. His plans for taking the position were made more difficult by rivalries among the attacking forces—an escort party bringing his troops reconditioned Lee Enfield rifles was ambushed by Mahsud tribesmen, who took the rifles for their own use. He had no qualms



about taking up arms against soldiers who, a year earlier, had been his colleagues in the pre-independence Indian army. ‘I was pitting my professional skill against that of an equally well qualified opponent,’ Harvey-Kelly reminisced, ‘and our cause was, in my opinion, a worthy one. The fact that India could employ all arms with impunity whereas we only had Azad Kashmiris (not renowned for their fighting qualities), Pathan tribesmen, a few units of regular infantry and a very few guns made the adventure even more of a challenge.’ He was eventually, to his dismay, instructed to return to base, leaving his battalion behind. Very few British officers fought with Pakistan forces in Kashmir, but Harvey-Kelly insisted that he was not unique in this regard.⁴³ At the beginning of 1948, British diplomats in Pakistan reported that six British officers who had just received their discharge had decided to join the Azad Kashmir forces—two of them were reputed to be ‘not very desirable’—but they were apparently persuaded to change their minds.⁴⁴

The open conflict between the Indian and Pakistan armies saw officers who had recently been comrades-in-arms fighting against each other, and generals who had been cadets together deploying their troops against old friends. The ripping apart of the undivided Indian army was one of the most painful, and grievance-ridden, aspects of Partition. Pakistan believed, probably with some justice, that India had dragged its feet in the division of resources that accompanied the allocation of soldiers and officers between the two countries. Pakistan certainly faced the greater task in establishing an army. Although the two armed forces shared a common military culture, their trajectory over the following sixty years has been markedly different. Pakistan has seen a succession of military coups and military leaders while Indian troops have never headed out of their barracks with the aim of overthrowing an elected government.

For many veterans of the first India–Pakistan war, the excitement of seeing active service in the cause of their newly independent nation was tempered by the knowledge that they were fighting against friends. Manmohan Khanna, who retired from the Indian army as a general, told me how in 1948 he had sent cigarettes across the front line to an old friend fighting against him. In Pakistan, another veteran who reached high military rank later in his career, Sher Ali Pataudi, told Victoria Schofield that he contacted an old buddy, one of the Indian commanders: ‘He said “For God’s sake, let’s stop.” I said: “I can’t until I get the orders.” We were great friends and we had to fight each other. It was a tragedy.’⁴⁵

The two armies did eventually stop. Pakistan’s General Gracey broadly achieved his aim of holding the Indian army at a line from Uri



through Poonch to Naoshera. In other words, Pakistan's army succeeded in resisting an Indian advance west, so protecting the main towns in Pakistan Kashmir, Mirpur and Muzaffarabad, and maintaining a buffer between Indian troops and the Pakistan heartlands. There was quite a lot of fighting, but no side gained a decisive advantage. Pakistani troops made their biggest territorial gains in Baltistan and Ladakh, taking control of the key town of Skardu—though India was able to secure the road route to the Ladakhi capital Leh. Along the Jhelum Valley road, there was something close to stalemate. Some of the keenest fighting was on the Jammu front, where in November 1948 Indian forces achieved a key objective, to relieve the siege of the town of Poonch. It had taken them a year, but with Indian troops prevailing, thousands of Sikh and Hindu refugees who had poured into the town when the conflict erupted were brought to safety.

Towards the end of 1948, moves began to achieve a ceasefire. It has often been said that the British commanders-in-chief of the two armies—Sir Douglas Gracey in Pakistan and Sir Roy Bucher in India—hastened the process, worried that the imminent appointment of the first Indian commander-in-chief General Cariappa in mid-January 1949 might frustrate an end to hostilities. Mountbatten had left for home in June, and this was the last chance for British nationals directly to shape the region's destiny. Given Britain's complicity in the immense human tragedy that accompanied Partition, perhaps bringing an end to a messy, indecisive war was modest recompense. The two commanders-in-chief were negotiating directly in the final stages of the ceasefire talks. There's a certain inevitability about the way military veterans on both sides have lamented that if only there had been a few more days or weeks before a ceasefire, their army would have gained the upper hand. Indian veterans have said that they were about to crack Pakistani resistance and advance along the Jhelum Valley road. Their old comrades and sparring partners in Pakistan have insisted that with just a little more time they would have been able to launch a counter-offensive, recapture Poonch, and advance on the city of Jammu. The real anxiety of both armies and governments was that the longer the war went on, the more likely it was to spread to the Punjab border, and erupt into an all-out conflict. Neither country had the stomach or resources for such a showdown.

A ceasefire came into force on New Year's Day 1949, with a defined role for the United Nations in supervising the end to hostilities. The ceasefire held, at first. By the end of January, a small United Nations military team was in place to help demarcate the ceasefire line and oversee





the truce. On the first count, the UN can claim some success. The ceasefire line was pencilled in on the map by November 1949. In the Kashmir Valley, it has hardly changed in the intervening decades, being a de facto partition line between India and Pakistan and much more impermeable than most international borders. But there was no lasting end to hostilities. UNMOGIP, the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan, has had the soul-destroying task of documenting breaches of the ceasefire to the best of its ability—and there have been many thousands over the years—without having any means of keeping the peace. It still has headquarters in Rawalpindi and Srinagar, and a string of small offices on both sides of the line of control—including, at one time, a base in Baramulla just a short stroll from St Joseph’s convent and hospital. When last I called there, there was a lonely South Korean soldier going stir-crazy—confined to two rooms, and not even able to venture out to buy groceries without an Indian escort. His radio set was the only means of contact with his colleagues. Few UN forces can have spent so much effort over so many years to so little purpose.

