

The So-Called “Faringees” of the Sikh Army and the Monumental Grave of Colonel Canora at Haripur, Pakistan

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Abstract

Ranjit Singh employed a number of foreign officers popularly known as “Faringees”. One of these was Canora – an artillery officer posted at Haripur. He was shot dead during his duty by one of the Chattar Singh’s soldiers he disobeyed his orders. His grave is located in Chaman Park lady garden at Haripur city. The history of the burial, as noted in the gazetteer, is somewhat different from that of Major James Abbott. An attempt has been made in this paper to discuss the popular foreign officers in service of the Sikh army.

Key Words: Colonel, Canora, Chattar Singh, Hazāra, Ranjit Singh

Ranjit Singh, the Sikh ruler of the Punjab, died on 27 June 1839. Before this, he built up his army as one of the best fighting force of the world. He began by recruiting Hindustani deserters from the East India Company’s troops, and gave training jobs to the senior among them. In order to make the infantry popular he used to attend its parades in person and to extend special favour to infantrymen. Once this branch became popular with the Sikhs, he began to be selective and recruited the pick of the youth of the country, lying special emphasis upon good looks and physical fitness. Hindus and Muslims also came in and were selected on the same criteria. Two European officers Allard and Ventura, joined the Mahārāja’s service and helped in putting the infantry on a proper footing.

After organizing the infantry Ranjit Singh turned his attention to the artillery. The Sikhs had no experience of heavy artillery and only knew how to use small swivel guns. In the beginning he had to import both officers and gunners from outside the Punjab. Among the senior officers he recruited were to Europeans, Claude Auguste Court, and Alexander Gardnes. In order to cast guns he established a number of gun factories, of which local

men, trained by foreign officers, took charge in due course.

Ghorcharha Fauj (Cavalry) was the aristocratic branch of the army by reason of its dignity. It was manned by representatives of the powerful families of the country whom Ranjit Singh thought it necessary to keep near his court for political reasons.

Ranjit Singh's "*faringees*" , as the foreign officers were popularly called, consisted of Italians, French, Americans, Englishmen, Greeks, Russians, Germans, Scots and Anglo-Indians as the following table given by G. G. Smyth in his *The Reigning Family of Lahore*, (First Pakistani edn. 1978: xxxvi)

Alvarine	Italian	Infantry	Died at Lahore
Ventura	Italian	Infantry	Left
Avitabile	Italian	Infantry	Left
Bianchi	Italian	Infantry	Left
Gordon	Anglo-Indian	Cavalry	Died at Lahore
Holmes	Anglo-Indian	Infantry	In service
Cortlandt	Anglo-Indian	Infantry	In service
Fitzroy	Anglo-Indian	Infantry	Left
Leslie	Anglo-Indian	Infantry	Left
Barlow	Anglo-Indian	Cavalry	Left
Allard	French	Cavalry	Died at Peshawar
De l'Ust	French	Infantry	Left
Dubignon	French	Infantry	Merchant at Lahore
Mouton	French	Cavalry	Left

De la Rocha	French	Infantry	Fell from horse and died
De Fasheye	French	Cavalry	Died at Lahore
Jervais	French	Infantry	Left
Argon	French	Infantry	Left
Hommus	Spaniard	Infantry	Died at Lahore
Hurbon	Spaniard	Engineer	Left
Vochen	Russian	Infantry	Left
Honigberger	German	Medical	In service
Steinbach	German	Infantry	In service
Dottenwise	German	Engineer	Left
Harlan	American	Civil Engineer	Left
Gardner	American	Artillery	Left
Kunarai	American	Artillery	In service
Hest	Greek	Infantry	Killed at Lahore
Hureleek	Greek	Infantry	Left
Mc Pherson	English	Infantry	Left
Foulkes	English	Cavalry	Killed by Sikhs
Ford died	English	Infantry	Wounded by Sikhs and died
Moervious	Perssian	Infantry	Left

De la Font, 1 st	French	Infantry	Left
De la Font, 2 nd	French	Infantry	Left
De Fasheye (son)	French	Cavalry	Left

This obviously is not an exhaustive list for we find more names in the other sources. These include an Englishman called Price, a deserter from Ochterlony's troops. He was the first to come. Then came a number of Anglo-Indian soldiers of fortune, some of them sons of well-known British officers, including Robert Dick, son of Major General Sir Robert Dick, and Jacob Thomas, son of the famous adventurer, George Thomas.

Another Well-known figure, at least in Hazāra (Pakistan), was an American artillery commander called Canora or Colonel Canora. He was posted in Haripur by Rāja Chattar Singh, the Sikh governor of Hazāra. The Sikh ruled by this time had greatly weakened because of defeat they suffered at the hands of the British who appointed their own officers in various parts of the country apparently to assist the Sikh governors. James Abbot was working in this capacity in Hazāra. Meanwhile Mūlrāja, the ruler of Multan decided to oppose the British and requested the Sikhs to help him. The Sikh army in Hazāra under Rāja Sher Singh, son of Chattar Singh, made preparations to move to Multan but Abbot did not like it and wanted to obstruct. When Chattar Singh came to know about Abbot's designs, he collected the entire Sikh army at Haripur and order Canora to move. But he refused to obey and was therefore murdered by some of the Sikh solders when he pointed guns at the Sikh armies and threatened to blow them up. He lies buried in the present Ladies Garden (Chaman Park), near the District Headquarters Hospital to the right side of the main road in Haripur bazar (Lat. N 33. 99485 and Long. E 072. 93097).

During the British period a pyramidal structure was raised upon the grave. It is built of locally available stone blocks, properly dressed and fixed in lime mortar and brick powder. It is square in ground plan and measures 2.36 m a side. Originally it was four metres in height (Figure 1) but because of the filling around the level of the surrounding area has risen by two metres (Figure 2) so that the present height has been reduced to merely two metres. The south, almost in the middle, shows the matrix of a square

inscribed slab (now missing). The text of the inscription noted before its disappearance, reads “Canora, who fell nobly in the performance of his duty. Being summoned by the rebel Sikh Army to surrender his guns and being basely deserted by his men, he seized the linstock and fell singly combating a host, July 6, 1848” (Wace 1883-84: 34). The structure of the monument, gently tapering upwards, ends in a square slab measuring 0.80 m a side. The top stone shows a grooved line running on all the four sides.

According to Sabir Canora was murdered on 4 August, which is obviously an error (see Sabir, M. S. 1986: 539). James Abbot writes that Canora was an American soldier of fortune named Kennedy (Allen 2000: 162-63). He is mentioned in the Gazetteer of Hazāra (1883-84: 34) as a French, which is incorrect.

Discussion

The first foreign officer who proved really valuable acquisitions was Jean Francois Allard and Jean Baptiste Ventura, Who joined Ranjit Singh’s service in 1822. Allard was a French and Ventura an Italian. Both came of good families and both had served under Napoleon in the armies of Spain and Italy. After the declaration of peace they had been demobilized and had unsuccessfully tried their fortune in Egypt and Persia. They had then come to Lahore. Allard was commissioned to raise a corps of dragoons, to be disciplined and armed exactly on the same lines as a cavalry crops in Europe. Ventura was put in command of the *Fauj-i Khāṣ* – a special brigade in the Khālṣa army. Both were given liberal salaries.

Another prominent foreign officer was Colonel Henry Court, a French of noble birth educated at the Ecole Polytechnique of Paris. He commanded two Gurkha battalions and later on organized what was known as French Legion. He was a man of culture and refinement as well.

The most dramatic of Ranjit Sing’s officers was Paolo de Avitabile, an Italian by birth, who had also seen service in Persia. He was a stout six-footer and ruthless in his methods of administration. He was therefore generally employed where a heavy hand was needed. He was first posed as governor of Wazirabad, but was later transferred to Peshawar, who governed Peshawar (AD1838 – 1842) and locally known as *Abu Tabela*, (Jaffar 1946:

103), where his name is still remembered by people as strict disciplinarian.

Ranjit Singh used his foreign officers mostly for purposes of training. Although he gave them responsible positions, he never put them in supreme command of any major expedition.

Acknowledgement

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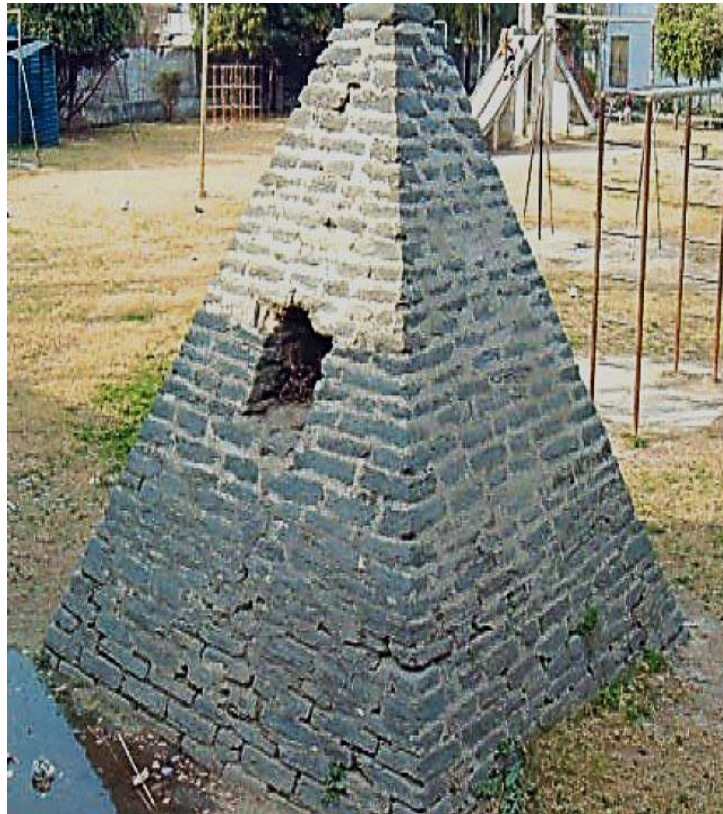
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Figures



(Courtesy by Daily Tribune)

Figure 1. (Haripur): An old picture of Colonel Canara Monument, view south east corner



Figure 2. (Haripur): Recent view of the Monument from the south