

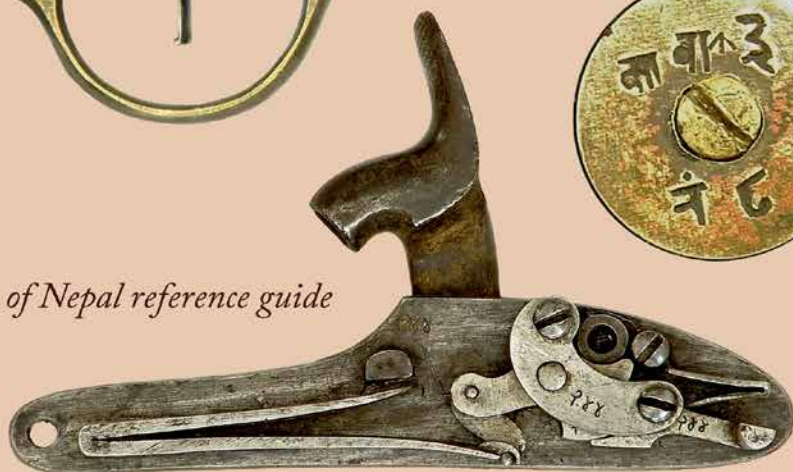
# THE NEPALESE GUN MARKS

*National and unit markings,  
dates and numbers*

JOHN WALTER



*The Guns of Nepal reference guide*





*Please note:*

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(especially serial numbers and unit markings)  
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The text has been corrected to  
14th September 2015

FOURTH REVISION

# The Nepalese gun marks

*National, corporate and unit marks, dates and numbers  
found on military stores*

Nepalese firearms will be found with a variety of marks. These include a selection of stamps and inscriptions applied by the British Army and the armies of the East India Company Presidencies (Bengal, Bombay, Madras) prior to dispatch. Interesting though these are, many are comparatively well known: the royal cyphers, the use of inspectors' and proof marks; and at least some of the abbreviations used by the best-known regiments. However, it is the Nepalese markings that hold the key to interpreting the service career of a particular weapon.

One of the biggest problems to be faced is the Nepali language itself, formed in characters that—though largely shared with Devanāgarī—are unfamiliar to most Western collectors. This may be judged difficult enough in itself, but there are other factors.

The adaptations that are made to any language as time passes, and several revisions to the method of 'Romanising' the characters made since the mid-nineteenth century, have created problems of their own. A recent parallel can be seen by comparing the markedly different transliterations of Chinese provided by the previously universal Wade-Giles system with the currently favoured Pinyin method.

The poor educational structure of Nepal, particularly prior to the reforms undertaken in the early twentieth century, confined literacy to a tiny section of the Nepalese people. Consequently, when markings were to be applied to the guns, armourers or *Loharkana* were not always sufficiently well educated to apply them correctly. It is not unknown for the wrong character to be used, or for the appropriate character to have been inverted.

Orthography is rarely consistent, even though many lists of units have been found. For example, in a return made in 1859 by the British Resident in Kathmandu, Brian Hodgson, the name of one regiment is given as 'Dobee Dutt' and another as 'Pooran Goruk'. In a report made in June 1894 by Henry Wylie, however, these had become 'Debi Data' and 'Purana Gorakh'. *The Royal Nepalese Army Colours. A Short History*, published in Kathmandu in 1989, lists them as 'Devidutta' and 'Purano Gorakh'.



**Above:** some of the P/76-type socket bayonets retrieved from Nepal in 2002. Even this small sample shows how unit markings will often be found on the scabbard lockets. Visible are two marks applied by the Kali Prasad battalion (का प्र), and one by the Gorakhnath battalion (गो रा).

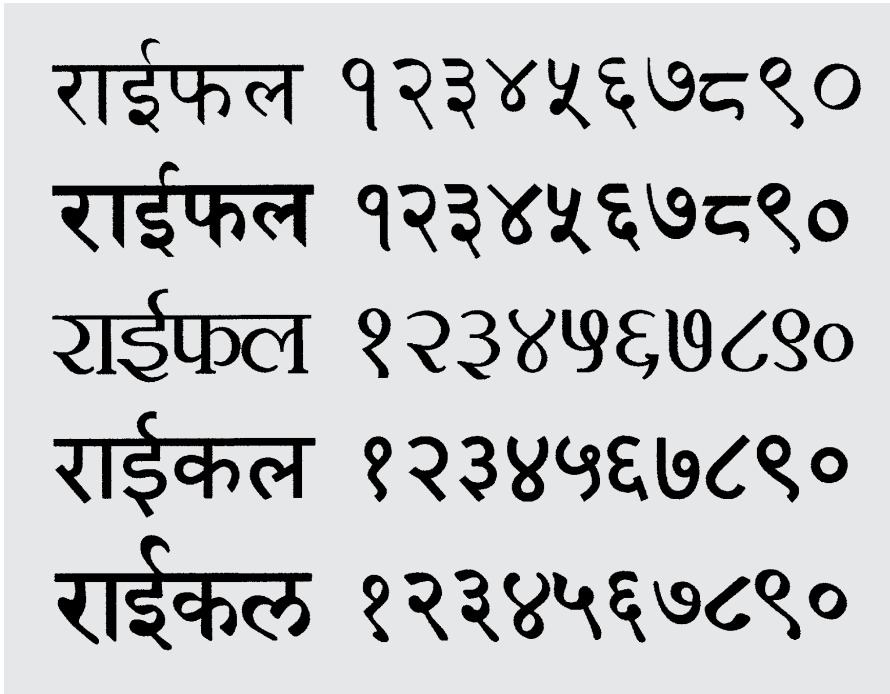
That variety can be found in the characteristics of individual letters in the Roman alphabet is often all too obvious; the difference between a traditional serifed face such as **Bodoni** and sans-serif faces such as **Helvetica** can be considerable, and those between cursive and decorative fonts can be so great that comprehension is hindered. This is particularly true of the **black-letter** or **Fraktur** forms, in which many characters—**E** ('E'), **G** ('G'), **M** ('M') or **W** ('W') for example—are notably difficult to distinguish. Unfortunately, exactly the same problems occur in the Devanāgarī script used in Nepal, which now also takes many forms.

In the days before mechanical typesetting became commonplace, the way in which lettering was cut depended entirely on the skill, education and experience of the cutter. Consequently, the design of individual characters could differ considerably. In addition, modern Nepali makes distinctions that were unknown prior to the educational reforms of the early twentieth century: the separation of **ब** *ba* and **व** *va*, for example, was not recognised by the armourers who marked Martini-Henry and Lee-Enfield rifles. In their day, the character that now represents *va* sufficed for 'ba' and 'va'.

Another problem is posed by abbreviations of unit and other names. Were the first characters of each name-part to be used? Or should the vowel which regularly accompanies a consonant be used as well? The resulting 'syllable' (which usually amalgamates parts of each character) can look very different from its individual components, and the same is often true of the 'constructs' that combine elements of two or more consonants.

The way in which the marks were applied poses more questions. Most post-1870 British or U.S. examples were applied by punch-strikes, and the letterforms are consistent even though individual applications may sometimes be poor or uneven. Conversely, most pre-1914 Nepalese marks were engraved, cut with chisels or files, or formed of small dots at the point of a bradawl or even a handy nail!

**Below:** these modern Devanāgarī fonts show many differences in detail. This is particularly obvious in the third sample (Kruti Dev) and the fourth (Mangal), which take cursive and 'sans-serif' approaches respectively. Differing numbers can be seen, especially १ '1' and ८ '8'. Most of the marks found on Nepalese military stores preserve the traditional '8', with an upright 'reversed J' stem and the cap-line angled diagonally upward.







Many variations exist of the mysterious 'lion-and-spear' and 'lions-and-temple' marks, possibly introduced by Bhimsen Thapa or by Jang Bahadur. Note the degrees of abstraction in the execution of the lions on the langets of the Brunswick sword bayonets and a chupi bayonet blade!



Attempts to simplify individual characters so that they could be applied with a few short straight strokes, avoiding curved edges, often led to the omission of primary identifying details. It is not unknown for the wrong character to be used, or for vowel signs to be applied either to the wrong stroke or facing the wrong direction. Some modifiers which should join the top line may be detached, and others which should be detached may merge. Characters can be run together or applied separately, the latter usually being easier to decipher.

The similarity between certain characters presents a problem in itself, scarcely alleviated by the individualistic nature of armourers' marks that reduce ण *na* (equivalent to 'no.' in Britain or '#' in the U.S.A.)—which should have a short down-curving hook on the crossbar—to three straight lines. A similar example concerns the closed loop or 'bowl' on ण *va* (formerly also used for *ba*), which is sometimes constructed with a straight horizontal stroke ending in a blob...which may lead to confusion with ण *na*.

Though the significance of marks on 'front line' rifles such as the Martini-Henry can usually be determined, the interpretation of those taken from 'second line' weapons is not always so obvious. It is suspected that some of these lesser marks may conceal the identity of militia or irregular forces, and that others—on pistols and revolvers in particular—may signify police departments. There may also be a few personal names, but the presence of elements such as ण ३३३, 'nā 333' ('no. 333' or '#333'), usually highlights corporate instead of singular nature.

Markings on the guns will usually be found on trigger guards, the straps (or 'tangs') of the butt plate, and the sides of the butt. The handguns are often marked on the frame; bayonets are marked on the socket or the pommel; and scabbards are customarily marked on the locket ('top mount'). Guns and bayonets may bear several markings, providing clues to their service career.

## 1. NATIONAL AND CORPORATE MARKINGS

Though the Nepalese made use of many guns bearing the marks of the East India Company, by gift or capture, few of their own weapons bore recognisable national symbols.

The exception is provided by a range of weapons, including flintlock muskets, kukhris and the so-called chupi bayonets, with marks which appear to include rampant lions holding spears tipped with pennants and, on lockplates at least, a wooden temple assumed to be the Kasthamandap in Kathmandu. The origins of these marks are still disputed. They were once traditionally associated with the Sikhs (inferring that the Nepalese captured



Marks associated with the East India Company will be found on many of the flint- and cap-lock firearms used in Nepal. Some had been captured prior to 1816, when the Treaty of Segauli brought a measure of stability to the region, and others were gifted at the end of the Sepoy Rebellion ('Indian Mutiny') in 1858. Note the precision with which the 'bale mark' (above) and the post-1808 crown and lion (below) have been cut. Beware modern copies, which are never as well defined...!





the guns during the Sikh Wars), but this explanation no longer seems tenable. Too many Nepalese marks have been found for the story to be as simple. Yet reliably dating them is still impossible.

Eye-witnesses confirm that Jang Bahadur was accompanied by a sizeable bodyguard when he left Calcutta for Europe in 1850. The men carried flintlock muskets and chupi bayonets, but how were they marked? No-one recorded any details.

It has been suggested that Jang brought back the idea of a 'coat of Arms' from Britain when he returned to Nepal in 1851. None of the Brunswick rifles are marked in this way, but their back-action locks do not offer the same surface area as the flinted side-locks; however, many of their sword bayonets have lions (of varying degrees of simplification!) cast into the langets.

It is possible that the marks on the muskets were confined to locks made only in 1851-4; but, equally possibly, they *could* date from the supremacy of Bhimsen Thapa (1816-37), from the attempted restoration of power to the monarchy after the fall from grace of Thapa, or from the period immediately after the rapid rise of Jang Bahadur following the so-called 'Kot Massacre' of 1846. A theory has even been advanced that the Nepalese adapted Arms found on some of the coins circulated by the East India Company from 1801 onward, but, though attractive (and in many ways logical), no evidence in support of this idea has ever been provided. And no 'Nepalese lion' has yet been seen that could date after 1860.

## 2. SEQUENTIAL NUMBERS

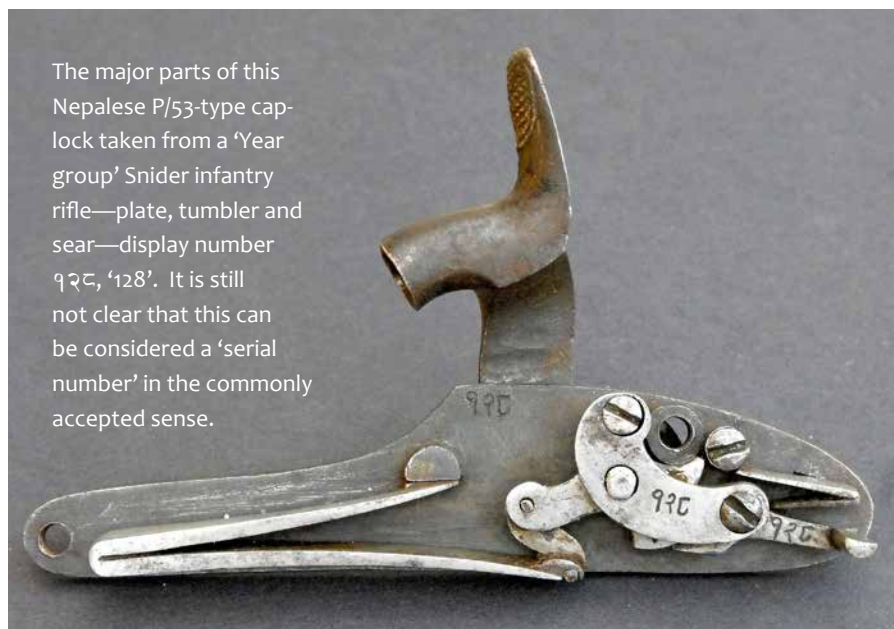
It is doubtful if any of the guns made in Nepal prior to the visit of Jang Bahadur to Europe, in 1850-1, bore numbers of this type. Nepalese-made Brunswick rifles often bear numbers (up to three digits) on the bayonet bar and sometimes also on the underside of the stock, but there is no evidence that these are 'serial numbers' in the commonly accepted sense; they could have been added by the battalion to which the guns had been issued (though the occasional presence of unit markings on the trigger-guard straps makes this unlikely) or by the individual manufactory.

The same may also be said of the P/53 Enfield copies, as all the numbers observed were within the total quantity that would have been used by each of the battalions. The Sniders seem to have been the first to employ numbers as an overall accounting tool. Their numbers will be found on butt plates, breech-shoe straps, and the rear surface of the hammer spur; they are also commonly encountered (particularly on guns of the 'Assembly group') inside the lock plate and on the sear, the tumbler and the bridle.



**Above:** the bayonet bar of this Nepalese 'Smoothbore Brunswick' bears a sequential number ४४७, '447', cut into the shoulder at the rear. These guns seem to date from the late 1850s; at this time, there was no overall inventory of Nepalese weapons and it is suspected that the numbers were applied in any one of several manufactories.

The Nepalese Francotte-Martini-Henry rifles have numbers of three or much more rarely four digits with a Nāgarī character prefix, whereas the first-series Gehendras make use of a similar sequence with a suffix. The order





**Above:** a Ge-Rifle of the ‘long inscription’ type (top), with the dedication—to Gehendra himself—above sequential number ४१७ ल, ‘417 la’, and गो ना identifying the Gorakhnath battalion (‘section 3, no. 1’). The lower gun comes from the later ‘Cha-type’ Ge-Rifle series, with a dedication to prime minister Chandra Shamsheer on the body-back above the date सं १९६१, ‘year 1961’ [B.S., or 1903/4]; sequential number ३९०, or ‘390’; गो ना identifiers of the Gorakhnath battalion (‘section 2, no. 2’); and the character ह, the meaning of which is unclear even though it appears to have been cut at the same time as the unit-mark.

or rationale of the identifiers is not clear: eleven characters have been found on the Francotte-Martini and five on the Gehendras, but two of the former group are clearly syllables (an amalgamation of consonant and vowel) and so a strictly alphabetical explanation seems unlikely. It is possible that an arbitrary key to the sequence existed: the characters comprising a name, for example, in the same way that the Japanese used the sequence of ideographs provided by a traditional poem. However, this is still a matter for speculation.

Numbers on the Francotte-Martini-Henry appear on the underside of the body, hidden by the breech lever; on the detachable lock, and on some of the major parts (e.g., the breech-block); on the butt-plate strap; and on both barrel bands. Numbers on the Gehendra lie on the back of the body beneath the dedicative inscription, on the butt-plate strap and on the barrel bands.

A few copies of the Lee-Metford were made, probably about 1907/8, bearing nothing but tiny Nāgarī numerals and an occasional inspector’s symbol. The later Nepalese SMLE (Lee-Enfield) rifles were made in three

series. A small 'pre-production' group of no more than ten or twelve guns had nothing but tiny numbers on the right of the action alongside the chamber. Guns made in 1913/14 and 1914/15 were not only dated, but numbered in separate groups; those made in 1942/3–1944/5, however, were numbered in a single series without regard to the date.

### 3. DATES

Only some of the P/53 Enfield copies, the second series of Snider infantry rifles, the later (post 1902/3) Gehendras, the Improved Gehendras and the perfected SMLE copies (but not the 'pre-production series') are dated. The Enfields are usually dated on the barrel and the Sniders display only the last two digits of the Bikram year on the strap behind the breech-shoe, but the others are dated in full.

### 4. UNIT MARKINGS

Though some individual pre-1850 flintlock muskets bear markings, these are customarily confined to a sub-unit or 'section' number (generally lower than '10') and the weapon number of one or two digits.

Cap-locks, particularly those acquired after the Indian Mutiny, present more information than their flintlock predecessors. Unit marks often appear

**Below:** the butt of this East India Company 'Pattern F' musket, probably one of those given to the Nepalese contingent after the Sepoy rebellion of 1857–8, shows marks typical of its class—the 56th weapon issued to the fifth company of the 44th infantry regiment.



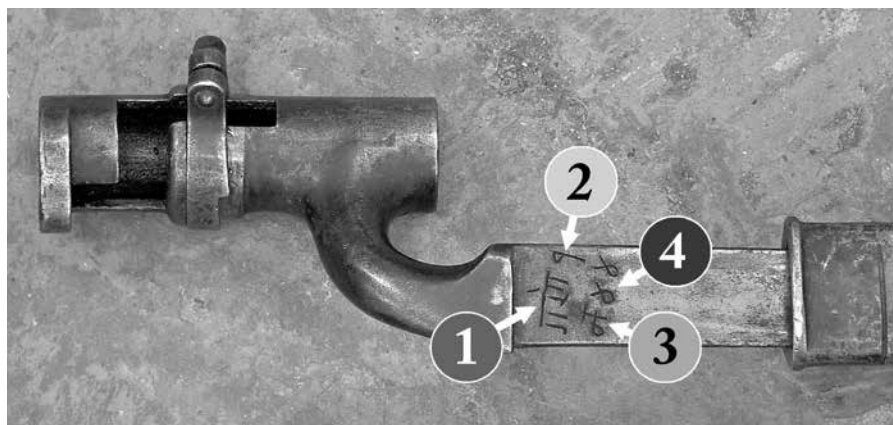


## Nepalese front-line army units, November 1891

	<i>Date raised</i>	<i>Strength*</i>	<i>Rank &amp; file**</i>
<b>CAVALRY</b>			
King's household cavalry	1849		
<b>INFANTRY</b>			
Rifle battalion (Raiphal)	1850	794	711
Second rifle battalion (Dosra raiphal)	1888	521	505
Kalibakas ('Kali Buksh')	1762	548	521
Naya Gorakh	1783	548	521
Gorakhnath	1854	534	511
Sri Nath ('Shree Nath')	1762	595	521
Bard Bahadur ('Barda Bahadur')	1762	549	521
Sarjedal ('Suryadal')	1815	726	700
Bhairung	1854	565	541
Kali Bahadur	1855	577	521
Debi Data ('Devidutta')	1763	547	521
Narsingdal ('Narsimhadal')	1805	765	741
Jabar Jung	1791	544	521
Ganes Dal ('Ganeshdal')	1846	592	541
Jagadal ('Jagdal')	1849	528	501
Bhairab Nath ('Bhairavnath')	1810	527	501
Kalidal	1783	374	360
Purana Gorakh ('Purano Gorakh')	1763	568	521
Kali Prasad	1806	547	521
Singha Nath ('Singhnath')	1786	548	521
Shamsher Dal	1844	574	521
Ram Dal	1783	568	541
Sher	1806	597	570
Chhsakamini ('Chhyaskamini')	1854	621	600
Jung Nath ('Janganath')	1854	554	531
Barakh†	1784	596	558
Sabuj†	1762	607	558
Indra Dhoj†	1804	609	587
Naya Sri Nath ('Naya Shreenath')†	1783	474	449
<b>ARTILLERY</b>			
Raj Dal	1844	588	521
Mohendra Dal ('Mahindradal')	1845	559	521
Jangi	1874	611	592

\* Excluding officers above the rank of Ensign and Subedar. \*\* Excluding officers, NCOs, writers, bandmen.

† Stationed in the hills; all other units were stationed in Kathmandu at this time.



**Above:** most Nepalese unit marks take the form shown on the blade of this ex-British P/1876 Martini-Henry bayonet. Key: 1, characters ग ने signifying the unit, the Ganeshdal battalion; 2, a single number १ ('1') signifying the first section or 'sub-unit'; 3, the नं character, *nā*, 'number'; and 4, the sequential number ४४ '44'.

on the trigger guard bow; and the same is generally true of Nepalese P/1853 cap-lock Enfields and Sniders.

The unit marks found on Nepalese-made Martini-Henry and Gehendra rifles, if present, will usually be found on the side of the butt or, in the case of the Gehendra, on the rear of the body beneath the serial number.

Few (if any) of the Martini-Henry rifles acquired from Britain display British Army unit marks. However, the Mk II and Mk IV Martini-Henry rifles often show signs of use in India before being passed to Nepal, which is particularly true of the 'long lever' guns supplied in 1906–10.

A particularly rich source of information was provided by the bayonet scabbards, which often had marks struck, cancelled, re-struck and re-cancelled on the locket or 'top mount'. It was equally clear that the system had not changed for many years.

The principles underlying the application of Nepalese marks are similar to those used by the British Army. The repetitive pattern consists of a unit identifier in one or more Nāgarī characters, followed by a number signifying a sub-unit or 'section' (1–10), and then by an individual weapon number of one, two or three digits.

The marks will often be cut into the butt and under the trigger guard, the latter, if different, usually proving to be older. The principal inhibition to identification is provided partly by the unfamiliarity of the Nāgarī characters

and the differing ways in which they are rendered, but also by inconsistencies in the abbreviations. However, they can still be transcribed.

A typical 1885-vintage Martini-Henry displays an Enfield roundel on the right side of the butt, accompanied by the Mark ('II.') and Class ('I.'). There are no visible British issue marks, and an additional Allahabad roundel on the butt over '2' may indicate a downgrading of Class on arrival in India. The presence of S.R. over a divider and 293 indicates issue as the 293rd gun of the Sind Rifle Volunteers. The last ordnance mark is dated '1894'. As the gun

**Below:** marks applied to trigger guards of typical ex-East India Company cap-lock muskets pressed into Nepalese service prior to 1860. *From left to right:* का व Kali Buksh battalion, section 2 number 28; दे वी Devidutta battalion, section 2 number 38; रै Rifle battalion, section 7 number 9; and another दे वी Devidutta example, section 10 number 8.





**Above:** five of the British Mark II Martini-Henry rifles supplied to Nepal in 1894 display new Nepalese unit marks added to the underside of the trigger-guard bows. *Left to right:* **no. 1,** गो ना Gorakhnath battalion, 'section 4, gun no. 56'; **2,** भ प्र Bhairav Prasad company (possibly), 'section 1 no. 42'; **3,** भै रु Bhairung battalion, 'section 4 no. 43'; **4 and 5,** न गो Naya Gorakh or 'New Gurkha' battalion, 'section 3 no. 11' and 'section 4 no. 36'.

bears sale marks, NEP. and N ● S on the left side of the barrel beneath the back sight ('Nepal, 'Native State'), it was clearly one of those that were delivered to Nepal in 1894–5. This particular gun also bears the Nāgarī characters नै *bhai* and रु *ru* on the trigger guard, together with १ ('1'), न *na* and १० ('10'): the tenth rifle issued to the first section of the Bhairung battalion.

Comprehensive markings will also be found on the short Lee-Enfield (SMLE) rifles fitted with butt discs. Though the discs are detachable, and have clearly often been replaced, they are also double sided: some, therefore, bear not only Nepalese markings but also those applied in India before dispatch. Consequently, a typical Mk I SMLE, no. 22391A, made in Ishapur and converted in 1916 to Mk I\*\* I.P. standards (when the original date and pattern stamp were erased), displays a butt disc marked F E, 6 ● 13, with 2.U.P.H. and also 363. The gun had been issued from Firozpur Arsenal in June 1913, and served as the 363th rifle of the 2nd United Provinces Horse. It was



most probably one of several thousand guns—mostly old Mk I upgrades and conversions—that returned to Nepal with the Nepalese Contingent in 1919. It now also has the marks of the Kali Bahadur battalion, in the form of the

**Below:** the butt of this Mark IV ‘Class 1’ Martini-Henry rifle tells of its history in detail. Made in the Royal Small Arms Factory, Enfield, in 1887, the gun had been sent to India to be passed as fit for service in Fort William Arsenal, Calcutta, in December 1891. It then served the 21st Punjab Infantry Regiment (‘21. P.I.R.’) until the early years of the twentieth century. In December 1906, the rifle was sold ‘Out of Service’ to Nepal, receiving an inventory mark in the form of च cha and द्द्र ndra (for prime minister Chandra Shamsher) in a rectangular cartouche. The accompanying number, ‘1017’ in this case, can reveal some of the origins of the gun even if all other marks have gone. The Nagari unit identifiers पुराणो (Purano Gorakh, ‘Old Gurkha’) battalion, ‘section 10 no. 47’ can also be seen.





**Above:** the blade-back of this kukhri displays *tin-sri chandra*, a four-character dedication to prime minister Chandra Shamsher, the two identifiers of the second rifle battalion *Dosra Raiphal*, followed by the sequential number ५१५३ or '5153'. The '2.R.B.2 70' mark shows that the kukhri had been taken to India by the Nepalese contingent in 1915.

characters का *kā* and वा *bā* and the number १ ('1') above नं *nā* and ४७ ('47'), on the reverse of the disc.

The application of markings in the British-Indian Army was defined by *Instructions for Armourers*. The 1911 India Service version notes that carbines and rifles were to receive the initials of the issuing arsenal, with the 'number



**Above:** SMLE butt-discs marked by ज व Jang Bahadur company (left) and का वा Kali Bahadur battalion (right), probably after the guns had been taken back to Nepal in 1918.

## NEPALESE UNIT IDENTIFIERS

### *Examples identified to date*

These have been taken from markings found on a wide variety of weapons, and it is hoped that the transliterations are as accurate as possible. However (for reasons explained in the text), armourers sometimes used characters and at other times used syllables, which include a vowel. The precise form of the abbreviations also relied on individual interpretation. Where a single syllable has been applied (भै *bhai*, for example), it is assumed to have been used by the senior of the several units with names that begin identically: in this particular case, the Bhairavidal battalion. Marks qualified with '[\*]' have still to be reliably authenticated.

**Note:** at the time of writing, two marks have been reported ending in श *śha*. A conjunct of ज *ja* and न *na*, this is believed to be an abbreviation for 'battalion' (now गण *gana*). A possibility remains that a similar abbreviated form of 'company' (now गुल्म *gulama*) will also be found.

Barakh company व र  
Barda Bahadur battalion व व र or व र्द  
Bhagvahti Prasad company भ प्र  
Bhairavidal battalion भै [or भै रं]  
Bhairavnath battalion भै ना  
Bhairav Prasad company भै प्र  
Bhairung battalion भै रू  
Chandradal battalion च द

Chhyaskamini battalion छा क  
Devidutta battalion दे वी  
Devi Prasad battalion दे प्र  
Dosra Jangi battalion दो जं  
Dosra Raiphal battalion दो रै  
Ganeshdal battalion ग णे  
Goraknath battalion गो ना  
Himaldhoj battalion हि ध्व [\*]  
Indra Dhoj company ई ध्व  
Jabar Jung company ज जं  
Jagdal battalion ज द or ज र्द  
Janganath battalion जं ना  
Jang Bahadur company जं व  
Kali Bahadur battalion का व  
Kali Buksh battalion का वु  
Kalidal company का र्द  
Kali Prasad battalion का प्र  
Mahindradaal battalion म ही  
Narsinghdal company नं सी [\*]  
Naya Gorakh battalion न गो  
Naya Shree Nath company नं श्री [ना]  
Paila Jangi battalion प्रै चं or चं गी  
Parshwavarati battalion प र्व  
Pashupati Prasad battalion प प्र  
Purano Gorakh battalion पु गो  
Rajdal battalion रा ज  
Ramdal battalion रा म  
Rana Prasad battalion र प्र  
Raiphal battalion रै or रै फ  
Sabuj battalion स वु [\*]  
Samar Jung company स म or स जं  
Shamsher Dal battalion श द  
Sher battalion शे र  
Shree Nath battalion श्री ना  
Singhdal battalion सीं ह  
Singhnath battalion सीं न  
Surjadal company सु जे [\*]  
Yamdal battalion य द

of month and year of issue', on the butt discs (where fitted), the butt-plate strap (if brass) or the side of the butt (if fitted with a steel butt plate). Arsenal identifiers included Al. for Allahabad; Fe. for Firuzpur (Ferozepore); F.W. for Fort William; K.K.A. for Kirkee; M. for Madras; Q. for Quetta; R. for Rangoon (Burma); and R.P. for Rawul-Pindi.