

**Direct Action Day (16 August 1946),** also known as the **Great Calcutta Killings**, was a day of widespread communal rioting between Hindus and Muslims in the city of Calcutta (now known as Kolkata) in the Bengal province of British India.

The day also marked the start of what is known as *The Week of the Long Knives*.

The 'Direct Action' was announced by the Muslim League Council to show the strength of Muslim feelings both to British and Congress because Muslims feared that if the British just pulled out, Muslims would surely suffer at the hands of overwhelming Hindu majority, which resulted in the worst communal riots that British India had seen.

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DELHI, SUNDAY, AUGUST 25, 1946.

## MILITARY'S GOOD WORK IN CALCUTTA

### ALL AVAILABLE FORCES USED TO RESTORE ORDER

### Police Inability To Cope With Situation

### HELP IN CLEARING BODIES & DEBRIS

FROM OUR CALCUTTA OFFICE

AUGUST 23.—The story of the part played by the military in Calcutta since August 16 was recorded at a Press conference today, which Maj-Gen F. R. R. Bucher, GOC-in-C Eastern Command, attended along with other army officers. When the disturbances broke out, Gen Bucher said, there were in Calcutta four British, one Indian and one Gurkha regular battalions, and some light and heavy tanks. Afterward they had been forced to bring in another regular British battalion, a Gurkha battalion and an Indian battalion.

An account of the military activity was given by Brig J. D. C. Sixsmith, officiating Commander, Bengal and Assam Area. He said that on the morning of August 16 reports of certain minor cases of violence reached him, but there was nothing to show that there had been any major outbreak.

At 2.45 p.m. he was informed that the situation was rapidly deteriorating. The question of calling out the military was considered. He tried to contact the Chief Secretary to the Government and was informed that he was with the Governor at Lal Bazar. He went to Lal Bazar and met the Governor.

There they were given a rapid appreciation of the situation by the Commissioner of Police. It was decided that they would go out at once to see for themselves what the situation was like. They were told that the crowds had so far offered no opposition to the police but there had been a considerable amount of looting. It was obvious to them that the situation in the area between Howrah and Sealdah stations was much worse than in other parts of the town.

The police had hitherto not fired a single round. In one or two cases tear-gas had been used. His own view was not articulated at that time he would have felt confident to drive down any street provided he was armed and had an armed escort with him. The crowds dispersed at the appearance of armed police or the military.

Brig Sixsmith, continuing, said that he then considered how best the military, if called out, could assist the police. He made it quite clear to the authorities that he considered that the police should restore order and that only if they were unable to do so should the military be asked to come out. He decided, however, that the situation was such that the military must make some move. He ordered a battalion to be ready to move immediately.

After returning from the tour he ordered the battalion to Sealdah station, from where it could easily move into the affected areas and take over control should the police fail to restore order.

Brig Sixsmith said that later in the day he and the Chief Secretary toured the city. They saw a certain amount of stone-throwing by a crowd of hoodlums and once again there was no trace of violence to his party. They met a number of processions but they did not hit the way.

In the meantime, reports of possible trouble in Howrah came in. He immediately ordered another battalion to go there.

At 12.30 a.m. on August 17 he was informed by telephone that the police considered that they could no longer control the situation without military assistance. After consulting the Chief Secretary, he ordered the troops to take action according to a plan which had been discussed between the civil and military authorities the previous afternoon. That plan was to keep open certain of the main roads, using force if necessary.

He and the Governor again toured the city in the morning. By the time the situation, in his opinion, had completely changed. The attitude of the crowds was different. He saw three men being beaten to death and ordered a policeman in their escort to fire. The crowd immediately dispersed.

Brig Sixsmith said that on returning to Headquarters, he had a consultation with the civil authorities and ordered that military force were to be fully used to restore order in the houses area between Sealdah and Howrah. For this purpose he ordered out another battalion so that by this time there were three battalions dispersed in the city, one in the north, a second in the east, and the third in the west.

Meanwhile reports reached him of disturbances in the dock and Alipore areas. The first, received at 4 p.m., related to a serious situation at Metiabruz. After consultation with the District Magistrate, Mr. Pargana, he ordered a company of a fourth battalion to Metiabruz, with the result that there was no further trouble in that area.

Later, at night he was informed that the situation in the remainder of the dock area was deteriorating and that the police could only maintain it.

(Continued on page 2 column 4)

### MORE SIGNS OF NORMALITY IN CALCUTTA

FROM OUR CALCUTTA OFFICE

AUGUST 23.—With most of the post offices open for business, discontinuance of delivery of letters and telegrams partially resumed, street cleaning and corpse disposal operating intensively, Calcutta made further progress on the road to normality.

No serious incident was reported though there were four isolated cases of stabbing. One of these proved fatal.

Public transport vehicles were out in full larger numbers, the train services operating on all sections except Gooch Sixes.

### SOME SHOPS REOPEN

The great majority of shops and stalls in the New Market were open but, with the exception of the early morning marketing rush, the number of prospective purchasers visiting the market during the day was again below normal.

The food problem still looms large in the minds of citizens. There were more supplies of potatoes and lentils on the three previous days but many had to do without their commodities. Pieces of potatoes and some other vegetables in a few markets dropped slightly.

According to a Government official, large supplies of vegetables and fish were reaching Howrah and Sealdah. The Government, using their own transport, cleared two wagonloads of potatoes from one of the stations on Thursday and today 24 wagonloads were taken delivery of by consignees themselves.

With regard to fish, he said that about 30 mantrons of carp and 40 mantrons of mackerel had been distributed to four markets and sold at controlled rates. At the Lake Market in South Calcutta, however, fish sold this morning at Rs. 8 per seer or 10 per cent more than on August 15, the day prior to the slaughter.

### SURVIVORS TELL STORY OF GREAT MASSACRE

FROM OUR CALCUTTA OFFICE

AUGUST 23.—Eyewitness accounts of the Calcutta massacre in which over 4,000 people were butchered and more than 11,000 injured during the four days through which the city's 4,000,000 inhabitants have passed, writes a staff reporter.

### MUTUAL DEFENCE SYSTEM OFTEN REPULSED GOONDAS

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### CALCUTTA CARNAGE



Hundreds of corpses lay on Calcutta's streets during the massacre in which 4,000 people lost their lives. Three bodies, in an advanced stage of decomposition, lie unattended on a cart, endangering the health of the city. Similar scenes were witnessed in many parts of Calcutta.

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## SURVIVORS' STORIES OF MASSACRE

(Continued from page 1 col. 4)

We blew conch-shells and beat gongs when danger was imminent.

"A man during the night was reported to be entering the bustee in a suspicious manner. People on the alert ran and brought him out. He was beaten almost to death and later sent out of the locality under a strong guard of young men.

"The following morning we saw dozens of corpses lying on the roads. They were rapidly decomposing, polluting the air. Chaos and calamity was everywhere.

"Powerless to help, being on the roof of a two-storeyed building I saw an elderly man beaten to death by a crowd of goondas," said another eyewitness.

"The old man, walking along with a small bundle presumably containing his cherished possessions, was tripped by one of the assailants. He fell to the ground and was immediately set upon and mercilessly beaten. He lay senseless. A few minutes later he moved pitifully. One of the goondas returned and stabbed him. The old man moved no more."

Evidence of bodies being thrust into sewers was given to me by another man.

"During the height of the carnage," he said: "I saw from my building four men being attacked and rendered senseless by some hoodlums. They were picked up and thrown into open sewer. I was unable to go down to help as goondas were looting a neighbouring house. However, I was able to summon police assistance."

"STEEL WIPED OUT"

A colleague writes: "I heard of how a mob surrounded and set fire to a bustee. As the inhabitants rushed out, they were seized and hacked to death. Others who remained were burnt to death. The whole bustee with its residents was wiped out."

In many mixed localities pacts were entered into by the two communities to save themselves from goondas. There were innumerable instances of Hindus sheltering Muslims in their houses in predominantly Hindu areas and Muslims saving Hindus in Muslim localities. There were cases in which they had to suffer at the hands of goondas for their humanitarian work.

In a bustee in Alipore leaders of one community went to the other and said: "If you want to fight you can have it now. If you don't, let us make joint arrangements to defend our bustee against any attack, by Hindu or Muslim, from outside."

The other party hastily agreed. Patrols were organized with whistles to report the coming of any mob. At the sound of the whistle, both communities pledged themselves to come to the help of the sentries with any weapons they had. They also promised that they would protect any other inhabitant of the bustee, whatever his religion. These precautions kept the bustee unharmed throughout the disturbances.

"While the goondas were engaged in wholesale massacre and looting, peaceful citizens were busy marshalling their meagre resources to defend themselves against mob fury," writes another colleague.

"Police protection not being available, people took upon themselves the task of protecting their own localities. Inhabitants of every street and lane organized volunteer corps to patrol the area day and night.

"Brickbats, bottles and other articles were kept on roofs and verandahs of houses for use in the event of an attack.

"Women and even children were instructed how to defend themselves.

"At strategic points, groups of young men were placed on watch duty. On alarms being raised by blowing whistles or bugles the volunteers ran to action points. Women and children took up positions on house-tops near brick dumps ready to act.

"An understanding was reached among the different organizations defending their respective localities for co-ordinated work.

"A messenger service was introduced to pass information from one district to another. Signals given by one party were responded to by the entire population in the adjoining area by a recognized system in order to signify their preparedness for any eventualities.

"By this means many an attack was repulsed and hoodlums were beaten back. Panic was allayed and confidence in the ability of the people to defend themselves was strengthened.

"When reports of families being isolated in danger zones were received, volunteers undertook rescue operations. Requisitioning private lorries and cars, parties penetrated into storm centres and moved to safety families from houses surrounded by threatening mobs.

"In many instances the refugees had been without food for over 48 hours and were found huddled together in one room.

"They had to leave all their possessions behind. Brought to safety, these families were housed in relief centres opened in different localities.

"In the midst of carnage and looting, the work of 'peace brigades,' who carried out rescue operations in trying conditions, bear eloquent testimony to human goodwill and co-operation.

"Bands of young men, inspired by a sense of service and duty and regardless of communal feeling, worked from morning till night to remove people to safety zones."

## MILITARY'S GOOD WORK IN CALCUTTA

(Continued from page 1 column 2)

control up to 6 o'clock next morning. He therefore immediately ordered the commander of the battalion in that zone to move at once and be in a position to dominate the dock area. This was done and control was maintained.

Asked whether conditions in by-lanes where much of the fighting took place on Friday afternoon, were such as to require the calling out of the military, Brig Sixsmith said that it was not the business of the military to maintain order. The military was to be employed in the last resort.

Intervening, Mr. R. L. Walker, Chief Secretary said that decision at that time were in the hands of the Government.

Maj-Gen Bucher, after outlining the strength of the forces at his command on August 16, said that on the morning of August 18 he had personally ordered that the state of things prevailing in the Shambazar area must be terminated and that order must be restored throughout Greater Calcutta by the morning of August 19. He thought that the military had been able to accomplish this task.

Since then the military had made every effort to help clear up the damage and the general mess. They had performed every job that they had been asked to do. The soldiers had collected and disposed of some 500 corpses, collected refuse and sprayed DDT all over the city. Men of the Pioneer Corps had helped to remove garbage. Military nurses had been sent to hospitals and ambulances had been placed at the disposal of those in need of them.

Every single soldier, British, Indian or Gurkha, belonging to the regular army or Auxiliary Corps, had behaved in a magnificent way and he was proud of them.

The C-in-C, India, he said, had sent a telegram of appreciation of the work done by the military, obviously on information supplied to him by someone.

Sir Walter Gurner acknowledged, with gratitude, the services rendered by the military.

## TROOPS' WORK IN RIOTS PRAISED

"I have heard on all sides gratitude for the work carried out by British, Indian and Gurkha troops in Calcutta during the recent riots," says Lt-Gen Sir Arthur Smith, Deputy Commander-in-Chief in India, in a message to Lt-Gen F. R. R. Bucher, Officiating GOC-in-C, Eastern Command. Their bearing and discipline in most trying circumstances has been magnificent and worthy of the highest traditions of the Army.

"Please convey my thanks to all officers and men and emphasize that this is no mere formal recognition but is an expression of genuine appreciation for duty well done of which all may be proud."

## STABBING INCIDENTS IN BENGAL TOWN

ASANSOL, Aug. 22.—Five more cases of stabbing have been reported in Raniganj, 12 miles from Asansol, following the disturbance on "Direct Action" Day. The situation is still tense and shops in the locality are closed. Armored police continue to patrol the affected areas. Peace committees have also been formed.—API.

## DACCA DEATH-ROLL REACHES TEN

DACCA, Aug. 22.—Ten persons have been killed and 15 injured in incidents in Dacca since Tuesday last. Educational institutions remain closed and streets are deserted.