

QUEEN VISITS N.W. FRONTIER.

Sluggish indeed would be the imagination that was not stirred by the Khyber Pass. Through that bleak road to India marched the army of Alexander the Great, and even today some pass through, as though untouched by the progress of more than 2,000 years. For this is the forbidding highway holding the strategic key between the Sub Continent and Afghanistan. British Regiments that defended the Khyber Pass in the three Afghan Wars have their names perpetuated at this historic place: humble men from towns and counties, led by Generals whose names were household words. One young subaltern in action here more than 60 years ago - Winston Churchill. Along the motor road built in the 1920s now came the Queen and Prince Philip. They were coming to the border between Pakistan and her rugged neighbour, Afghanistan.

Shagai, the fort of the Khyber - Rifles, is a stronghold built in 1928, a reminder that the Khyber Pass still has military significance. They brought sheep in honour of the Royal Visit. The animals were afterwards slaughtered, to provide food for the chieftains. Awaiting the Queen were men whose forebears were among the historic enemies of Britain. Now that the old feuds have died down all is peace in the Khyber Pass. But understandably the Malaks are in no hurry to abandon the way of life followed for centuries. If these natural-born warriors compromise with the twentieth century, they don't altogether accept it.

Many a fine warrior who came to meet the Queen could remember the stirring times when a few crack shots, well concealed in this wild country, could take toll of the finest companies of troops.

The ceremony of the sheep was explained to Her Majesty. How long this ritual of hospitality goes back is not known, but it is jealously observed. And as the tribesmen are a practical race, to whom a living doesn't come easily, they pointed out that in the feast later on, each sheep would provide food for forty men.

The Pass runs for 27 miles, it's highest point, 3,500 feet. But as the local governor and Brigadier Rakhmangul explained, it is not altitude that gave the Khyber importance, but its strategic position in the mountain fringe of the sub Continent. Though perhaps the military glory has gone, the fame of the Khyber Pass will never be forgotten.