

The Dogra army had halted in this position for fifteen days, exposed to frost by night and to hunger by day. Many had sought shelter from the snow amongst the overhanging rocks, and there they sat listless and vacant, and utterly indifferent whether they should be cut off by the sword of the enemy, or be frozen to death by the cold. The Vazir saw the desperate state in which he was placed, and roused himself to discover a passage across the river, but after several hours' vain search he returned in the evening wearied and despondent. Upon this Mehta Basti Rám and some others, to the number of about forty, determined to make a last effort to extricate themselves from their difficulties. At midnight, with only one companion, Basti Rám examined the bank of the river for several miles, while his party kept up a smart fire upon the Botis (Tibetan Baltis) on the opposite bank, to distract their attention. At length they discovered a place where the river was frozen over sufficiently thick to bear a man's weight, save about 20 feet in the middle, where the ice was thin. Then, sending for assistance, they cut down trees and placed them over the weaker parts of the ice, and by 5 o'clock in the morning the Indus was passable.

Intelligence was sent at once to the Vazir, by whose order this small party of forty men was the first to cross the Indus; but they had been so benumbed by their night's work, and by their previous exposure, that ten of them sank down exhausted, and afterwards lost their hands and feet, and eighteen others were unable to get through the snow. Basti Rám was then left with only twelve men, which the Botis perceiving, they moved to attack him; but, in the meantime, Zoráwar Sing, having roused a number of his men, pointed out to them that the river was passable, and that it had already been crossed by some of their more adventurous fellow-soldiers. Upon this a number of Dogras advanced gladly to the attack. The Indus was rapidly passed, and the small party of daring men, after a smart fight, were safe. The Botis retreated, leaving 200 men dead on the field, and 100 men wounded. The Dogras lost only 25 killed, and 15 or 16 wounded in the action; but they had about 500 men more or less disabled by the loss of hand or foot during the exposure to the snow of the last few days.

The retreating Botis were pursued, and slaughtered for nine miles, as far as Marwan, where the victorious Dogras pitched their camp. The Vazir halted there for a few days to reorganize his troops, and to reward those who had distinguished themselves in the last action. To Mehta Basti Rám he gave rs. 500 and a pair of gold bangles, and to thirty-two others of his party he gave similar presents of less value, to some rs. 100, to some rs. 50, and to others rs. 40, according to their deserts.

Zoráwar Sing then advanced to Skardo (Skar-rdo), and after some desultory firing, the fort was surrendered by Ahmed Shah for want of water. He was shortly afterwards deposed by Zoráwar Sing, who installed his eldest son Muhammed Shah in his room, on the promised payment of an annual tribute of rs. 7,000. But the astute commander, who had profited by his experience in Ladák, would not leave this new conquest to the doubtful faith of a son of Ahmed Shah. A small garrison of trustworthy soldiers was placed in a new fort on the bank of the river, to confirm the faithfulness of the new king, and Ahmed Shah and his favourite son were carried off