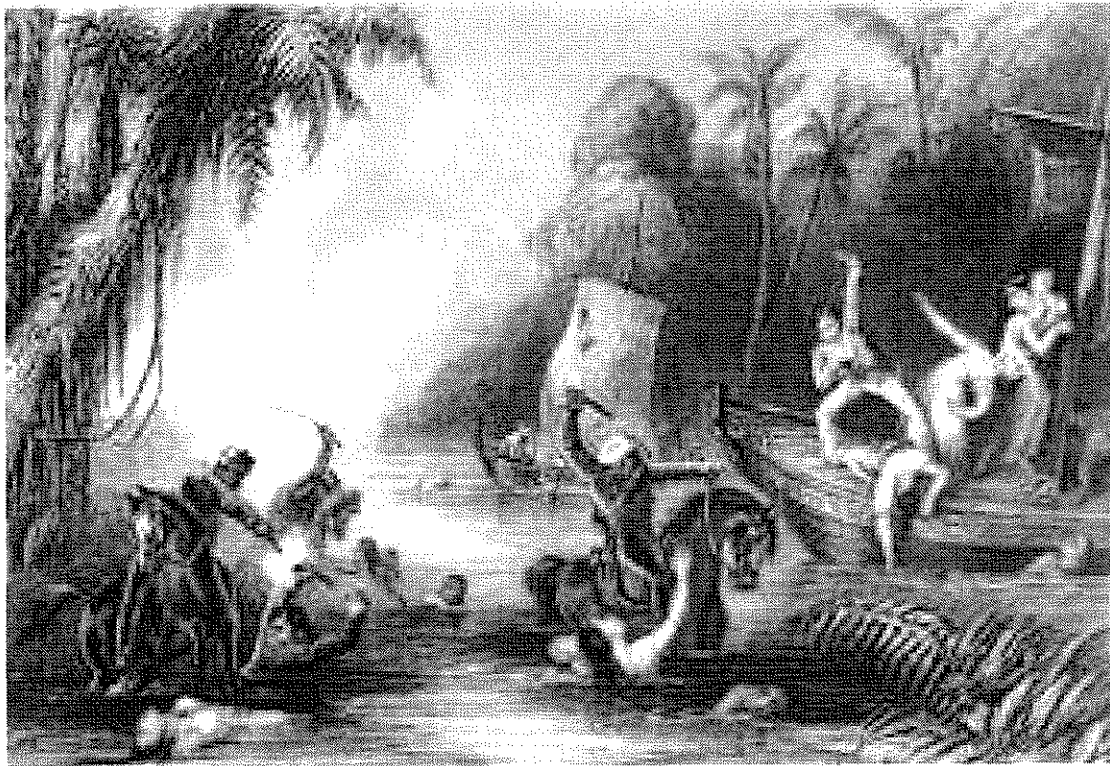


The First Indian War of Independence (1857-1858)



For 150 years the British East India Company ruled Indian civilians through an army of native soldiers, known as Sepoys, commanded by British officers. In the 1850's, the British officers, began distributing a new type of firearm to their Indian soldiers: the Enfield rifle. Instead of old-fashioned musket balls, the Enfield fired a new type of bullet, giving the rifle increased range and accuracy. Bullet and powder were contained in a paper cartridge, which was heavily greased to keep the powder dry. Loading the rifle required biting off the end of the greased cartridge to expose the gunpowder. The cheapest grease usable for the guns contained the fat from pigs and cows, meaning that biting the cartridge was sacrilege to both Hindus and Muslims alike. With their typical disrespect of Indian beliefs and culture, the British hid this fact from their Sepoy army for months. The Hindu Sepoys who used these guns believed the sin they had committed plummeted them to the depths of the untouchables. Distraught and enraged, in 1857, 85 Sepoys took a stand and refused to use the new rifles. They were immediately stripped of their uniforms and sentenced to ten years hard labor. Outraged by this hypocritical religious persecution, other Sepoys rose up and freed their comrades, killing any British soldiers who stood in their way. India was already seething with discontent at the East India Company, and this mutiny was the push needed to launch a full scale rebellion.



Sepoys enjoyed great gains for several months. Launching a brave, and sometimes excessively violent campaign. But the British soon rallied and crushed the revolt. To teach the Indians a lesson, the British slaughtered thousands of unarmed Indians and torched towns to the ground. They even forced their prisoners to lick the blood of dead British families off the floor before taking them out and hanging them. The Sepoy Rebellion left a bitter legacy of fear, hatred and mistrust for the British. It also brought major changes in British policy. In 1858 Parliament ended the rule of the East India Company and put India directly under the rule of the British crown. It sent more troops to India, taxing Indians to pay the cost of the occupying forces.

1. Describe the scene in the photo above.
2. Construct a play-by-play account of the First Indian War of Independence. (you will be responsible to teach this information to your partner)