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IMPHAL - KOHIMA

ENCIRCLEMENT

14th British Army
15th Japanese Army

8 March-22 June, 1944

Prepared by: Staff Group 10C

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ABSTRACT

COMMON REFERENCE: Imphal-Kohima, 8 March 1944 to 22 June 1944

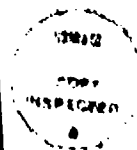
TYPE OPERATION: Encirclement

OPPOSING FORCES: US/ALLIES: 14th British Army, 33d British Corps,
4th Indian Corps
ENEMY: 15th Japanese Army

SYNOPSIS: The battles in the vicinity of Imphal and Kohima in eastern India reflect an aggressive army without adequate logistic support attempting to encircle and destroy a defending army which is able to sustain itself through aerial resupply.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Defeat Into Victory by Field Marshal Viscount William Slim; Burma, 1942-1945 by Raymond Callahan; Battle for Burma by E. D. Smith; The War Against Japan by Stanley W. Kirby; and, Tactics and Strategy of the Japanese Army in the Burma Campaign by the U.S. Military Observers Group.

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SECTION 1:

Introduction to the Battle of Imphal-Kohima

Introduction

This is an analysis of the World War II battles which centered around Imphal and Kohima near the India-Burma border during March - July 1944. For many months prior to the battles, the Japanese military leadership in Burma had been recommending an invasion of India. Early in 1944 Imperial Japanese Headquarters ordered the 15th Army commanded by Lieutenant General Renya Mataguchi to "invest the vital areas of northeastern India in the vicinity of Imphal". As a result, on 8 March 1944, three reinforced Japanese divisions and a division of the Indian Nationalist Army (INA) totalling 155,000 troops crossed the Chindwin River and struck out across the mountains. The three Japanese divisions were the 33rd Division, 15th Division, and 31st Division. The INA Division was commanded by Chandra Bose, an Indian nationalist who hoped to liberate his country from British imperialism.

Opposing them were divisions of Britain's IV Corps of the 14th Army: the 17th Division near Tiddim in the Chin Hills, the 20th Division in the Palel-Tiddim area, and the 23rd Division with which were two regiments of the 254th Indian Tank Brigade positioned in Imphal as a strike force.

Good sources of information exist concerning the Battle of Imphal-Kohima. One of the best sources is the Decisive Battle, Vol III of The War Against Japan from the History of the Second World War, United Kingdom Military series, published in 1961, which represents the official British historical account. The series is edited by Sir James Butler. The authors are all British military officers. The volume is more than an historical account of actions. It is, rather, a detailed documentary that contains assessments by the British combatants as the actions took place. These assessments have the advantage of hindsight. They contain significant conclusions that could only be discerned at the end of the war when events could be seen in proper perspective. The volume contains excerpts from official British documents and correspondence. One must conclude that it has been thoroughly researched, given the sources available to the British Government, and honestly written from the British point of view.

Another source of information is Defeat Into Victory by Field Marshall Sir William J. Slim, who at the time of the battles was commander of 14th Army. Field Marshall Slim's book is a valuable first person account of the

battles seen from a commander at a relatively high level. It is very valuable for insight into the perception of British leadership, why decisions were made and the derived outcome and perceived Japanese intentions. It is less valuable for detailed accounts of small unit activities. Purely military activities were condensed.

There are several official military sources of information available. One of the best is Tactics and Strategy of the Japanese Army in the Burma Campaign, Nov 43 to Sep 44. This document was prepared by the US Military Observers Group in India and the Joint Intelligence Collection Agency on October, 1944. Most of the information contained therein was provided by American officers in the area of operations of the British 14th Army through personal observation, interviews, and official reports. The document is a massive and extremely detailed account of Japanese tactics and procedures with respect to activities such as general positioning, camouflage, ammunition storage, local protection, air defense, communications, gun emplacement, and disposal of casualties. The writing is also a good source of information for terrain analysis, trafficability, and weather. It tends to be a clinical analysis, dealing less with the actual battles than with the characteristics of Japanese tactics and procedures. It is an extremely valuable source for an analysis of the things the combatants were able to do and how they might have done them better. The purpose of this work was to document Japanese tactics and procedures in the field for other units fighting the Japanese.

A valuable source of the Japanese perspective and intentions was the Burma Operations Record of 15th Army Operations in the Imphal Area and Withdrawal to Northern Burma. This was prepared in 1952, revised in 1957, by Mr. Jiso Yamaguchi for the Headquarters, U.S. Army, Japan Historical Division. It is based upon the recollections of Lt. General Mataguchi and several high ranking staff officers in 15th Army and division level staff officers. Mr. Yamaguchi's book is very detailed and is the best source for the Japanese point of view.

The book Burma, 1942-45 by Raymond Callahan, published by Associated University Press in 1979, offers a different perspective of the impact of the Imphal-Kohima battle within the context of the war in Burma. While this different perspective is beneficial, the book is written at the strategic level. It is much less useful for insight into the operational

aspects of the battle than many other available references.

Air Supply in the Burma Campaign by Dr. Joe G. Taylor of the USAF Historical Division published in 1957 and Air Operations in China, Burma, and India in World War II, prepared by the US Strategic Bombing Survey Committee of Military Analysis Division in 1947, are the best sources of information concerning the air war. Dr. Taylor's book is particularly useful for an analysis of the problems of air resupply. Taylor's sources were the diary of Brigadier General William Old, a report by Vice Admiral Mountbatten, and Defeat Into Victory by Slim. Air Operations..... is a very clinical analysis and a bit too detailed for the purpose of this evaluation; nonetheless, it offers some insight. Other official sources were available and are documented in the bibliography. In general, there is a great deal of official information available with reliable, first-person reports. The official documents prepared by the British government are less detailed and plentiful than that provided by US sources. For example, the report by General Slim on the "Campaign of the 14th Army 1943-44" is but ten pages long and is much less valuable than his book.

SECTION 2:

The Strategic Setting

The Strategic Setting

The Battles of Imphal and Kohima were fought principally by the British and Japanese during the period February thru June 1944 as part of the Far East Burma Campaign of World War II. These battles not only culminated a series of Burma battles which began in early 1942 between Britain and Japan but also turned the tide in favor of the British. The totality of these confrontations created what was to be the largest land fight by any of the allies against Japan during the entire war.¹ Although Britain, with its primary regional interest of defending its Burmese colony against Japanese aggression, won the campaign, Burma soon thereafter gained its independence from British rule.

Japan's aggression was driven by a burning desire to expand its territory and natural resources. She realized an opportunity to seize such resource rich Dutch and British colonies as the Dutch East Indies, Malaya, Siam and Burma. Her aims were to acquire this theater and then establish a defensive belt around these countries. By doing this, Japan would have possession of such resources as oil and tin which her economy badly needed. Japan's expansionist effort as described above became known as "The Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere".² Japan saw no problem with aggressive behavior since the Burmese could probably be easily influenced to support a rescue from Western countries such as Britain and France who previously seized this area.

Britain's interests during World War II and particularly during the Burma Campaign were not limited to the Far East. Her primary interests were closer to home. Her interests were focused on Europe where Germany could rip across the continent at any time and threaten the homefront. This situation naturally influenced Britain's strategy throughout the war in other parts of the world. For instance, all forces, supplies, and other necessities required to win wars could not be concentrated in one area such as Burma. The Far East, however, remained high on Britain's list of priorities.

The Allied interests, specifically those of the United States, in the Burma area were greatly influenced by other Japanese actions throughout the Pacific, such as the bombing of Pearl Harbor. While the United States truly believed that Japan would avoid U.S. interests as much as

possible, the Japanese were prodding U.S. non-participation. As the United States became aware that Japan was planning an invasion of Burma, it immediately imposed a trade embargo on all war materials.³ Although the widespread feeling of most Americans was that of isolationism, the United States left no doubt in Japan's mind that she strongly opposed Eastern expansionism. The primary regional aim of the United States was to keep a road open leading into China. An open road would facilitate U.S. reinforcement of supplies, equipment and personnel if Japan decided to enter China as it had previously.

Other Allies, such as China, naturally had a geographical interest in supporting a halt to Japanese expansion. Although China constantly wanted assurance that the United States would continue to provide military and technological support, she continuously provided the British support in stopping Japanese aggression. As Japan indicated its move into Burma, all Allies reacted in a supportive manner.

To thoroughly understand the Battles of Imphal and Kohima, it is necessary to understand the principal events leading up to this period. On 20 January 1942, the Japanese Army invaded Burma with the capital city of Rangoon as their main objective.⁴ It was an opportune time since the British and Allied efforts in the entire Southeast Asia area were confused. That is, no organized strategic allied defense plan existed in this area of the world. The city of Rangoon was not only strategically important to both sides because it was the Burma capital but also because it was positioned on the major land line of communication between India and Burma. Although Burma was politically separate from India, it relied heavily on her for defense.⁵ After Japanese forces proved too strong for the British and Allied air and land forces. Rangoon fell on 9 March 1942.⁶

As the British and Indian troops retreated from Rangoon back to central Burma (the only feasible area to attempt a comeback), Chinese units were organizing to support the allied effort. "In the battle for Yenangyaung the Burma Division sought help from General Sun Li-jen and his 38 Division in what was to be General Slim's last chance to try to save the oilfields, but although the Chinese fought with gallantry, enabling the Burma Division to be extricated, their best effort was not good enough - and the final stage of the retreat unfolded".⁷ The British and Indian troops were then pushed back into India not only by the pursuing

Japanese but also by the bad weather brought about by the monsoons. By the summer of 1942, no allied troops remained in Burma. The Chinese were driven out, also back to their homeland.

The first attempt to penetrate Japanese-held Burma was not until February 1943. A group of British and Indian soldiers, known as the Special Force, led by Brigadier General Orde Wingate crossed over the Chindwin mountain range between India and Burma and penetrated the Japanese defense which had been undisturbed for several months. Although what Wingate actually accomplished with his relatively small force stomping around the jungle was questionable, he did manage to prove that the strong Japanese defense could be pierced. Critics felt that the only thing Wingate unfortunately accomplished was an early warning to the Japanese of a subsequent allied attack into Burma.

In July 1943, the United States reemphasized at a meeting of allies, an earlier belief that Japan could more effectively be defeated if fought in China and that China's survival as an active ally was more important than the battles in India and Burma. An open land route into China was paramount to the U.S. The British supported this strategy which would give Orde Wingate, now a Major General, another opportunity to penetrate the Japanese and push as far east as possible.

Wingate proposed a plan to assist the overall ally strategy. He proposed that his Special Force be given "the mission of blocking the Bhamo-Myitkyina road as well as mounting something more ambitious against the railway/road focus in the Indaw-Mawli area".⁸ Wingate believed that this would assist in eliminating the Japanese from Northern Burma which would ultimately facilitate General Stilwell's U.S. mission of opening air and land communications with China.

Ever since Wingate's penetration of the Japanese defense in February 1943, the Japanese became suspicious of British intentions and as a result stepped up intelligence gathering activities. Japan had been quick to recognize that Imphal was a growing base and stockpile of supplies which could possibly be the kick-off point for a major allied offensive.⁹

Wingate's part in the allied plan to attack Northern Burma, which was later known as "Operation Thursday", was to take the Japanese 18 Division by an airborne assault from the rear and cut off their supply lines.

This operation would precede the major allied offensive movement towards China.

As a prelude to the airborne assault by Wingate's Special Force, the United States Air Commando supported the operation with bombings, reconnaissance missions and strafings which played a big part in the successful invasion into Northern Burma.¹⁰

Operation THURSDAY which consisted of invasions by both Wingate and Stilwell forces, was successful but was overshadowed by the subsequent fighting and ultimate allied success in the Battles of Imphal and Kohima. Once the Japanese smelled an allied invasion into Northern Burma, they concurrently planned a major offensive to not only protect its territory but also to destroy any allied buildup effort in Imphal and Kohima.

What has been described above are the principal events leading up to the analysis of the Battles of Imphal and Kohima as will be beneficial to compare the principal antagonists with respect to their national objectives, military systems and previous performance.

As previously mentioned, Britain and Japan were the principal antagonists in the Burma Campaign. Characteristics of the allied forces, those of the United States and China, will be highlighted within those of the principals.

Britain's national objectives or interests in the Far East, primarily that of stopping Japanese aggression, were evident as early as 1914 when it was considering a naval war with Japan.¹¹ To prepare for such a war, Britain considered stationing a sizeable fleet, maybe at Singapore, to cover any Japanese naval advance south through the Indian Ocean. Several things, including the 1922 Washington Treaties on naval limitation (restricted British navy to meeting commitments in one hemisphere, but not simultaneously for a world-wide Empire), Britain's post-war (WWI) financial situation, and the mood of its people put a damper on this ambition.¹² Britain's eastern interests were almost defenseless and were left in the hands of the Japanese.

With her hands virtually tied as far as defending in the Far East, Britain at one time considered siding with the Japanese and jeopardizing its relations with the United States. These considerations never

materialized as Britain could not afford to have the United States as an adversary. Britain found it difficult to get the U.S. to commit herself to any British-American Far East defense agreement even after hostilities broke out between China and Japan in 1937.¹³ The widespread isolationist attitude across America was the primary reason for Britain's uncertainty of a firm U.S. position.

From 1937 to the beginning of WWII, Britain found itself changing its strategy focus from the Far East arena to the European arena where Germany was becoming a substantial threat. The Mediterranean then became a possible theater of operation with the Germans and Italians. Britain's primary interest then became stopping German aggression both west and south.

As Britain's strategy changed from 1914 to 1937, India's commitment as Britain's strategic reserve did also. Initially in March 1921, the Indian Legislature Assembly had defined the Army's duties as the defense of the frontier versus the British Empire's strategic reserve.¹⁴ Regardless, by 1933, India was again acting at Britain's disposal. By January 1939, a written commitment was signed between the two formalizing India's obligation to provide troops to Britain in other parts of the world when the need would arise.¹⁵

With this agreement Britain found itself providing financial support for the Indian Army to modernize. The army "was ill-equipped to fight a first class power - it had no armoured units of its own, for example, and its twenty cavalry regiments were still largely horsed".¹⁶

By May 1940, the British were committed to the Middle East, especially with the French downfall and the entry of Italy into the war. Britain was forced to concentrate its efforts in this area. It was committed to this area with hopes that the United States would support its Far East effort if a challenge was presented there.

Simultaneously, India was concentrating its effort on the Army expansion program. This program as previously setup called for an organization trained and equipped to react to challenges to the British Empire. India had its hands full expanding its Army with semi-literate peasants who would be required to man sophisticated weapons and equipment.¹⁷ By 1942, when war broke out with Japan in Burma, the Indian Army had expanded

to over a million men.¹⁸ The Indian navy and air force had grown proportionately. As the army grew so did the shortage of officers. Britain could not provide the officers required, therefore, more Indians were being commissioned to fill the positions. In addition to officer personnel shortage and training problems, India was not receiving its requirements for weapons such as field guns, anti-tank guns and anti-tank rifles which were needed for its expansion and modernization program.¹⁹

Once the war broke out in early 1942 with Japan, India again realized a shortcoming; that all of its previous desert warfare training for the Middle East was of little help in the jungles of Burma. Another late realization was that as Britain and India were preparing for a war in the Middle East, Burma was virtually ignored. "Yet from March 1941 (thru the end of the Burma Campaign) Burma began to play an increasingly important role in Anglo-American relations because it was the sole remaining link between China and its Western, principally American, supporters and suppliers."²⁰ Northern Burma, as previously described, became the launching ground for the Battles of Imphal and Kohima. Thus was the beginning of the Burma Campaign for the British and Indian forces.

What must be mentioned before reviewing Japan's national objectives, military systems, and previous performance is that the lack of a pre-defined defense plan and command structure for the Far East area greatly influenced the allied effort in Burma especially during the initial encounters. Japan noticed these weaknesses and took advantage of them by moving immediately into Burma. Britain was more concerned about its Empire as a whole and left a door open to the Japanese. The lack of a defined command structure among the British, United States and China led to disagreements and in some cases questionable loyalty.

During the interwar period, Japan experienced a fragmentation of both political and economic institutions that were not organized and strong enough to withstand internal turmoil. "This situation arose from the peculiar development of the Japanese economy. A constant rising cost of living index, largely resulting from a depression of living standards in order to raise profits and capital investment, made a prisoner of the urban and rural worker, reducing him to subservience and obedience."²¹

Japan also faced numerous agricultural and industrial problems during the interwar period. Japan's industrial economy relied heavily on imported

machinery and natural resources from such countries as the United States. Japan's agricultural problems were generally due to inefficiency. These worsening conditions later would affect Japan's political and strategic options.

As time progressed from WWI, Japan's military played a dominant role in politics and later pushed for an aggressive policy in the Far East.²² As the Great Depression struck Japan and the rest of the world, Japan began to look at China as a source of economic relief. "As long as China remained weak there was the opportunity and the temptation for Japan to try to capitalize on the situation...".²³

As Japan moved further away from the democratic countries of the United States and Britain and closer to Germany and Italy, there was a powerful urge for her to go to war. Her military had been strengthened through terms of several expansion programs. The army grew from a strength of 24 divisions and 54 air squadrons in 1937 to 51 divisions, 9 armored regiments, and 133 squadrons in 1941.²⁴

As countries such as the Netherlands, France, and Belgium were collapsing on the European front and as Britain was becoming increasingly weak, Japan realized that this was her opportunity to move into Burma to cut off reinforcing supplies into China. After all, there were no European powers in the Far East capable of stopping a Japanese invasion. This was the perfect opportunity to acquire the territory and natural resources she so strongly desired.

SECTION 3:

The Tactical Situation

Area of Operations

General. The battles of Imphal-Kohima took place around a collection of villages in Northeast India called Imphal, and another collection of villages called Kohima 60 miles to the north.²⁵ The area was part of the Central Front of the South-East Asia Command, a combined U.S.-British command which included Burma, Malaya, Sumatra, Ceylon, Siam (Thailand), and French Indo-China (Vietnam).²⁶ The popular reference term for the specific, local operational area around Imphal and Kohima was the Chin Hills. This area was bounded on the north by the North Burma Front and in the south by the Arakan Front. Fighting in the Chin Hills occurred over a distance 300 miles long from north of Kohima to south of Tiddim.²⁷

Climate and Weather. a. Operations around Imphal and Kohima occurred during the dry season in Burma, which is the best for military campaigns. During February and March, the area receives less than one-tenth of one inch of rain per month on average.²⁸ Temperatures are high and may reach over 100 degrees in the hottest part of the day, however, the effects of the heat are somewhat modified by the relatively lower humidity.²⁹ b. Effects of Climate and Weather. (1) Natural Features. During February and March, the soil is parched and hard. Rice paddies, and many of the smaller lakes and marshes in the Imphal Plain are dry. Moving men and vehicles stir up powder-fine dust which filters through the smallest opening and hangs in still air like a cloud for hours.³⁰ Several of the larger lakes in the area, however, in particular the Logtak Lake south of Imphal, have water year round. Rivers, including the Manipur which flows through Imphal, are sluggish this time of the year.

(2) Manmade Features. Roads and trails were in relatively good repair.

(3) Equipment and Supplies. Wheeled vehicles and tanks could operate easily over dry weather roads, grassy areas and cultivated fields. The greatest physical menace to equipment and supplies was the dust that was churned up from roads and trails by men and vehicles.³¹

(4) Troops. The hot, humid weather caused troops walking through scrub or thick grass to tire quickly. Fatigue caused by prolonged operations in hot, humid conditions also caused troops to be more

susceptible to tropical diseases such as malaria.³² The heat and humidity also increased the requirement for drinking water.

(5) Tactical Operations. Dust in the air degraded the effectiveness of air reconnaissance, since it was often difficult to see downwards into the valleys for more than a mile.³³ Radio communications frequently failed in the damp night air, and night winds drowned out the sounds of enemy movement.³⁴

Terrain. a. In general, the area defined as the Central Front consisted mostly of heavily wooded mountains intersected by narrow valleys with steep sides. The vegetation in the mountains included open forest, forest with heavy undergrowth (true jungle) and open grassland. Around the villages, there were rice paddies and cultivated plots - these were dry during February and March 1944.

The Naga Hills, located in the vicinity of Kohima, vary in height from 1000 to 5000 feet. The mountains farther south in the vicinity of Imphal and Tiddim are considerably higher. They average more than 6000 feet in the Tiddim area, with peaks of more than 9000 feet. "The only sizeable flat or low-lying areas are the Kabaw Valley to the southwest of Imphal and the Imphal Plain; the former, a disease-ridden tract of thick forest and scrub, the whole of which turns into a swamp during the monsoon. The Imphal Plain, a plateau about 3000 feet above sea level, covering about 600 square miles around the villages referred to as Imphal, is comparatively fertile, but is entirely surrounded by jungle-covered hills."³⁵

b. Imphal. This collection of villages was located on the main line of communication between India and Burma. Imphal was the chief town of the Native State of Manipur in India about fifty miles from the Burmese border. In 1945, it was strategically important as the British advanced base for maintenance and operation of their land and air forces on their central front in Burma. It was also the nodal point on which hinged the defense of the land and air lines to China through Assam in North Burma. Control of Imphal was vital to any force invading Burma from India and vice versa.

If the Japanese controlled the Imphal Plain and its two all-weather airfields, they would be able to attack British bases and airfields farther to the west. They would also be able to interrupt the vital Assam

lines of communication on which the British campaign in the air ferry route to China over the so-called "Hump" depended.³⁶

c. Kohima. This group of villages was located about 60 miles north of Imphal on the major road to Dimapur and the Bengal-Assam railroad. This railroad was part of the LOC which was the principal means of overland supply of British forces in North Burma (and ultimately to China).³⁷

d. Effects of Terrain. (1) Observation and Fire. High ground throughout the battle area enhanced surveillance of critical areas, and facilitated fires on more low-lying areas. Indirect fire in the close, mountainous terrain involved "extraordinary angles of sight and depression not allowed for on normal range tables".³⁸ Line of sight observation and fire at ground level was restricted to as little as 10-20 yards.³⁹ Intervening mountains between geographically distant units and patrols often created "dead space" where radio communication was impossible. The mountains also sometimes blotted out radio communications between aircraft and their base of operations.⁴⁰

(2) Concealment and Cover. Thick vegetation provided very good concealment from overhead observation by reconnaissance aircraft. This was less the case along roads and trails, and along riverbeds. The Japanese took special care to utilize natural cover and concealment and to camouflage their positions and activities.⁴¹ Thus, early in the campaign, they successfully evaded much of the British reconnaissance, bombing, and strafing effort. As the campaign progressed, however, British pilots gained an intimate knowledge of the country and of the Japanese concealment tactics; and this enabled them to successfully locate the Japanese and blast them out.⁴²

Disease. a. The jungles around Imphal and Kohima are infested with malarial mosquitos, scrub typhus mites, and the bacteria and amoebae of dysentery. Malaria was the most frequent disease, but scrub typhus was perhaps the most dangerous. It was caught from a mite which frequented the long grass where soldiers walked or slept and had a fatality rate as high as 20 percent. Until very late in the Burma Campaign, there was no vaccine and no specific treatment except nursing, complete rest, immobilization in bed, and feeding. Pack mules were also susceptible to surra, a pernicious form of anemia.⁴³

Blood-sucking leeches were prevalent, and attacked both troops and mules.⁴⁴ Large water-rats were a menace because they stole such scarce

items as toothpaste and bars of soap, and they attempted to get at the wounds of patients convalescing in field hospitals.⁴⁵

b. Effects of Disease. (1) Sick rates among troops in theater were 500 per 1000 per annum in 1945. The average proportion of battle casualties to sick admissions was 1 to 10. The peak number of sick admitted to the hospital in one week in 1945 was 7893.⁴⁶

(2) Whole units were rendered combat ineffective by disease. The effect of malaria was most marked on technical troops such as Signal troops and Engineers, and this delayed construction of urgently needed telegraph routes and, at one time, caused a complete lack of any type mechanical repair. Morale suffered because troops feared the various diseases, especially scrub typhus which was so frequently fatal.⁴⁷

Avenues of Approach. The Japanese plan of attack is illustrated by Map #1. The plan called for assaults from a number of different directions at different times.⁴⁸

The main part of the Japanese 33d Division was to open with a surprise attack on the Indian 17th Division. The mission of the 214th Regiment was to move westward along a jungle track leading to Tongyang and the Tuitum Ridge, and cut the Tiddim-Imphal road. Another strong detachment of the 33d Division (the Yamamoto Force) including most of the 213th Regiment, was to move up the Kabaw Valley towards Tamu. South of Tiddim about 15 miles the enemy's Western Manipur Force, comprising most of the 215th Regiment, crossed the Manipur River at Maulbem. Its mission was to circle the British positions at Tiddim and then move north to cut the road to Imphal near Milestone 100.

The Western Manipur Force moved mostly at night through thick jungle among steep hills. Neither air reconnaissance or infantry patrols could effectively track its size or movement.⁴⁹

Once 33d Division disposed of 17th Division, it was to continue to advance northward and enter the Imphal Plain from the south. On reaching Tamu, Yamamoto Force was to turn westward, drive on Pael, and capture the high ground overlooking Imphal.⁵⁰

The Japanese 15th Division crossed the Chindwin River in the vicinity of Thaungdut southeast of Imphal in three columns. Its mission was to advance rapidly, isolate Imphal from the north and then capture the town.

One column moved south to attack the flank of the British 20th Division around Myothit, while another column approached Ukhrul only 50 miles from Imphal.

The 31st Japanese Division, in eight columns, crossed the Chindwin River on a forty mile front from Homalin to the north, and then pushed west. Evidently, some of these columns were to aid the 15th Division in taking Ukhrul and Imphal, while others cut the main road north of Imphal. Some of these columns moved through the hills toward Jessami, southeast of Kohima.⁵¹

The Japanese chose the best avenues of approach for the type of attacks they planned. Their overland movements, primarily at night, were concealed to a great extent by the jungle-covered hills, and thus they were protected from both air and ground observation. The difficult country did not prevent their long-range infiltration of large units, and they could not be channelized by British fire and/or obstacles. By choosing appropriate avenues of approach, the Japanese were able to achieve tactical surprise.

Tactical Situation

The situation in early March 1944 between the allies and the Japanese was of two approximately equal forces facing one another, each maneuvering for the initiative.⁵² The Allied IV Indian Corps composed of three divisions faced the Japanese 15th Army composed of three divisions. The Allied IV Corps was later reinforced by the 5th Indian Division and 33d Corps. The Allies were eventually able to mass a force that was superior in strength to the Japanese.

The following is the order of battle for the IV Indian Corps, 33d Corps, and the 15th Japanese Army.

IV Indian Corps

Corps Troops

Armor

- H.Q. 254th Indian Tank Brigade
- 3rd Carabiniers
- 7th Cavalry
- "C" Squadron 150th Regiment, R.A.C.
- 401st Field Squadron, I.E. (less one troop)
- 3/4th Bombay Grenadiers, less one company (Motorized)

Artillery

- 8th Medium Regiment, R.A.
- 67th Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, R.A.
- 28th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, R.A.
- 78th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment, R.A.
- 15th Punjab Anti-Tank Regiment
- One Battery 2d Regiment

Engineers

- 75th Field Company, I.E.
- 424th Field Company, I.E.
- 94th (Faridkot) Field Company, I.S.F.
- 305th Field Park Company, I.E.
- 854th Bridging Company, I.E.

16th Battalion, I.E.
336th Forestry Company, I.E.
3rd West African Field Company

Signals

IV Corps Signals

Infantry

9th Jat Machine - Gun Battalion
15/11th Sikh Regiment
Chins Hills Battalion, Burma Army
3rd Assam Rifles
4th Assam Rifles
78th Indian Infantry Company
Kalibahadur Regiment (Nepalese)
One Company Gwalior Infantry, I.S.F.

*(New unit) 5th Indian Infantry Division

Under command from 19th March 1944, less 161st Infantry Brigade with 33rd Corps

*(New unit) 89th Indian Infantry Brigade

From the 7th Indian Division under command from 7th May 1944.

*(New unit) 17th Indian Light Division

Artillery

21st Indian Mountain Regiment
29th Indian Mountain Regiment
129th Light Field Regiment, R.A.
82nd Light Anti-Aircraft/Anti-Tank Regiment, R.A.

Engineers

60th Field Company, I.E.
70th Field Company, I.E.
414th Field Park Company, I.E.

Signals

17th Indian Divisional Signals

Divisional Infantry

1st West Yorkshire Regiment
4/12th Frontier Force Regiment
7/10th Baluch Regiment

Infantry

48th Indian Infantry Brigade

9th Border Regiment

2/5th Royal Gurkha Rifles

1/7th Gurkha Rifles

63rd Indian Infantry Brigade

1/3rd Gurkha Rifles

1/4th Gurkha Rifles

1/10th Gurkha Rifles

Medical

23rd Indian Field Ambulance

37th Indian Field Ambulance

*(New Unit) 20th Indian Infantry Division

Artillery

9th Field Artillery Regiment, R.A.

114th Jungle Field Regiment, R.A.

23rd Indian Mountain Regiment

55th Light Anti-Aircraft/Anti-Tank Regiment, R.A.

Engineers

92nd Field Company, I.E.

422nd Field Company, I.E.

481st Field Company, I.E.

309th Field Park Company, I.E.

9th Bridging Section, I.E.

Signals

20th Indian Divisional Signals

Divisional H.Q. Infantry Battalion

4/3rd Madras Regiment

Infantry

32nd Indian Infantry Brigade

1st Northhamptonshire Regiment

9/14th Punjab Regiment

3/8th Gurkha Rifles

80th Indian Infantry Brigade

1st Devonshire Regiment

9/12th Frontier Force Regiment

31st Gurkha Rifles

100th Indian Infantry Brigade

2nd Border Regiment

14/13th Frontier Force Regiment

4/10th Gurkha Rifles

Medical

42nd Indian Field Ambulance

55th Indian Field Ambulance

59th Indian Field Ambulance

*(New Unit) 23rd Indian Infantry Division

Artillery

158th Jungle Field Regiment, R.A.

3rd Indian Field Regiment

28th Indian Mountain Regiment

2nd Indian Light Anti-Aircraft/Anti-Tank Regiment

Engineers

68th Field Company, I.E.

71st Field Company, I.E.

91st Field Company, I.E.

323rd Field Park Company, I.E.

10th Bridging Section, I.E.

Signals

23rd Indian Divisional Signals

Infantry

1st Indian Infantry Brigade

1st Seaforth Highlanders

1/16th Punjab Regiment

1st Patiala Infantry, I.S.F.

37th Indian Infantry Brigade

3/3rd Gurkha Rifles

3/5th Royal Gurkha Rifles

3/10th Gurkha Rifles

49th Indian Infantry Brigade
4/5th Mahratta Light Infantry
6/5th Mahratta Light Infantry
5/6th Rajputana Rifles

Medical

24th Indian Field Ambulance
47th Indian Field Ambulance
49th Indian Field Ambulance
50th Indian Parachute Brigade

Engineers

411th (Parachute) Field Squadron, I.E.

Infantry

152nd Indian Parachute Battalion
152nd Gurkha Parachute Battalion
50th Indian Parachute Machine-Gun Company

Medical

80th Indian Field Ambulance

XXXIII Corps

Corps Troops

45th Cav
149th Regiment RAC
1st Medical Regiment
56th Anti-Aircraft/Anti-Tank Regiment

*(New Unit) 2nd Division

Division Troops

10th Field Regiment, R.A.
16th Field Regiment, R.A.
99th Field Regiment, R.A.
100th Anti-Aircraft/Anti-Tank Regiment
2nd RECCE Regiment
2nd March Regiment
143rd SS COY
1st Burma Rifles
1st Assam Rifles

4th Brigad

I.R.S.

2nd Norfolk

1/3th Light Infantry

5th Brigade

7th WCRG R.

2nd DCR SET

1st Camerons

6th Brigade

1st R.W.F.

1st R. Berks

2nd D.L.I.

268th Brigade

2nd Bombay Grs.

5th Bombay Grs.

17th Rajput.

*(New Unit) 7th Indian Division

Division Troops

24th Mountain Regiment, R.A.

25th Mountain Regiment, R.A.

33rd Brigade

1st Queens

4/15 Punjab

4/1 G.R.

114th Brigade

2nd S Lan R

4/14th Punjab

4/5th G.R.

161st Brigade

4th R.W.K.

1/1st Punjab

4/7th Rajput

*(New Unit) 21st Indian Division

3rd SS Brigade
5th Commando
44th Commando
18th Mahrattas
Mahindra Dal Regiment

202 Area

11th Calvary
4/17th Dogra
1st Chamar
27th Mahrattas
1st Assam Rifles
Burma Garrison Battalion
Shere Regiment
3rd Gwalior Infantry

23rd Brigade

60th Field Regiment, R.A.
2nd D.W.R.
4th Border
1st Essex

ORDER OF BATTLE 15th JAPANESE ARMY

31st Division

Right Column

111/138th Battalion
One Battery 31st Mountain Artillery Regiment
One Platoon 31st Engineer Regiment
Signal and Medical Detachments

Center Column

138th Infantry Regiment (less III/138th Battalion)
One Company 31st Engineer Regiment
Signal and Medical Detachments (Including a field hospital)

Main Body (Divisional Reserve)

Headquarters 31st Division
124th Infantry Regiment
31st Mountain Artillery Regiment (Less two battalions)

31st Engineer Regiment (less two companies)
Divisional Signal Unit
Divisional Medical Unit (Including a field hospital)
31st Transport Regiment (Less one company)-

Left Column

Headquarters 31st Infantry Group
58th Infantry Regiment
II/31st Mountain Artillery Battalion
One Company 31st Engineer Regiment
Signal and Medical Detachments

15th Division

Advanced Guard

III/67th Battalion (Less two companies)
Detachment 15th Engineer Regiment
Regimental Gun Company 67th Infantry Regiment

Right Column

60th Infantry Regiment (Less one Battalion and two companies)
21st Field Artillery (Less two Battalions)
Two Platoons 15th Engineer Regiment
Half of a field hospital

Center Column

51st Infantry Regiment (Less one Battalion and two companies)
III/21st Field Artillery Battalion
Detachment 15th Engineer Regiment

Divisional Reserve

Headquarters 15th Division
Seven Infantry Companies
One Composite Infantry Company
15th Engineer Regiment (Less detachments)
Medical detachments
Half of a field hospital

33rd Division

Right Column

Headquarters 33rd Infantry Group
213th Infantry Regiment (Less 1/213th Battalion)

One company 1/215th Battalion
14th Tank Regiment (Less one company)
1st Anti-Tank Battalion (Less two companies)
II/33rd Mountain Artillery Battalion
3rd Heavy Field Artillery Regiment (Less one battalion and one battery)
II/18th Heavy Field Artillery Battalion
One company 33rd Engineer Regiment

Center Column

214th Infantry Regiment (Less Headquarters and two companies III/214th Battalion)
1/33rd Mountain Artillery Battalion
Detachment 33rd Engineer Regiment
H.Q. 33rd Division

Left Column

215th Infantry Regiment (Less two companies)
III/33rd Mountain Artillery Battalion
Detachment 33rd Engineer Regiment

Reserve (Fort White) Column

.. One company 215th Infantry Regiment
One company 14th Tank Regiment
33rd Engineer Regiment (Less two companies)
4th Independent Engineer Regiment
18th Heavy Field Artillery Regiment (Less one battalion)
Detachment 3rd Heavy Artillery Regiment
III/214 Battalion (Less two companies)

Technology

Overall, the British and Indian forces were equipped with weapons which were technically superior to those used by the Japanese. There were, however, relevant differences that will be pointed out.

A Japanese Infantry Regiment was equipped with a variety of small arms. These weapons included rifles, pistols, grenade dischargers, light machine guns, medium machine guns, 37 or 47 mm A.T. guns, 70 mm BN guns, 75 mm Regt guns, 20 mm A.T. rifles, and 81 mm mortars. Technically, the Japanese equipment was remarkable only for the number of features copied from weapons of other countries. The Japanese soldier was well trained in the use of his weapons so he was able to obtain maximum effectiveness in combat.

The artillery used by the Japanese during the Imphal-Kohima operations was quantitatively and qualitatively inferior to the artillery of the Allies opposing him. The Japanese inferiority in number of weapons and supply of ammunition was a more serious disadvantage than the quality of his weapons. Experience showed that although the Japanese artillery units were not as well trained as the British and did not use the modern tactics of the allied armies, nevertheless, they were effective in the Burmese terrain.

The Japanese employed five varieties of tanks during the Imphal campaign. These were the Type "98" Tankette, Type "98" Tankette (modified to carry a 37 mm gun), Type "95" Light, Type "97" Special Medium (mounting a 47 mm gun), and the Stuart MKI. The Stuart Tanks were captured from the British 7th Armored Brigade which was forced to abandon its tanks at Shwegyin on the Chindwin River during the 1942 retreat from Burma. Prior to the Burma operations, Japanese views on tank design and tank warfare had been formed from experiences in China - in more open country and against an enemy deficient in anti-tank guns, so that speed, rather than protection or armament was the most important consideration.⁵³ The Japanese realized after his Burma experience that the tanks he employed were insufficiently armed and armoured as compared to the tanks used by the Allied Forces.

Japanese engineering methods have been criticized because roads and bridges which they constructed did not meet the technical specifications of British and American efforts. This criticism was based upon a false

comparison.⁵⁴ The sizes and quantity of equipment moved by the British and the Americans was much greater than that moved by the Japanese. Japanese engineering works, therefore, did not need to be as strong as those of the Allies. The true measure of the Japanese engineers' effectiveness is whether or not they have fulfilled their mission for their forces. By this measure the Japanese engineers performed exceedingly well during the dry season. The Japanese efforts failed in the monsoon but so did those of the Allies. The reason why this failure was disastrous for the Japanese and not for the Allies was because the Japanese had no alternate system of air supply where the Allies did.

The Japanese Air Force in Burma, though sufficiently threatening to deliver an occasional sting, was not an actual or potential threat to the Allies. The likelihood of the Japanese Air Force creating any serious damage by strategical bombing or giving any material assistance to their ground forces in a close support role was very remote. The most that could be expected from these forms of attack was a long-range, one-punch attack with very temporary and local air superiority over an operational area. A more significant threat to the allies was the attack of its long range supply planes. This threat however could be beaten down by the Allied superior air power. The most far reaching deficiency of the Japanese Air Force was the lack of an air supply system. The Japanese Air Force in Burma was only a nuisance and not a threat to the Allied ground and air offensive.⁵⁵

As stated earlier, the Allies were better equipped with weapons than the Japanese. The fundamental strength of the Japanese was the defensive power of their small units. Their lack of firepower, sustained striking power and lack of air resupply led to their ultimate defeat.⁵⁶

Logistical and Administrative Systems

The defeats suffered by the British at the hands of the Japanese in 1942 were, in part, caused by the ability of the Japanese to repeatedly cut the British Army's lines of communication. 14th Army was deployed on a 700 mile front that stretched from the Chinese frontier beyond Fort Hertz to the Bay of Bengal along the Indo-Burmese border, over terrain characterized as being railless, roadless, (even trackless during the six month monsoon season). It was covered with jungles and

precipitous mountains, disease infested and inhabited by wild tribes.⁵⁷

Rail & Water. As there were no through roads, logistics support reached the fighting by a circuitous rail and river route.⁵⁸ From Calcutta supplies traveled 235 miles by broad gauge rail to Parbatipur where coolies unloaded the cargo and transferred it to a ramshackle meter gauge train which then traveled up the Brahmaputra Valley to the ferry at Pandu (215 miles), where the cars were uncoupled, loaded on barges, floated across the river, reconnected and sent on to Dimapur (the central front terminous) another 200 miles. The peacetime capacity of this rail system was 600 tons per day, but had been raised by the British to 2800 tons; a totally inadequate amount to support British forces.⁵⁹ Six battalions (4700 men) of fully trained railmen provided by the Americans in 1944 eventually raised the tonnage to 7300 tons a day by January 1946. Besides this rail route to the front there also existed an 1136 mile river route used mainly by barge traffic.

Roads.⁶⁰ To help bridge the gap between the needs of the army and the capability of the rail system, three all-weather brick roads were constructed in the fall of 1943. Designed by British Army Engineers and built by more than 60,000 laborers brought in from the tea plantations in India, the roads zig-zagged up and down the precipitous mountains for hundreds of miles. Used daily by thousands of lorries, the roads were susceptible to sinking and landslides during the monsoon season. Kilns were stationed every 20 miles to provide fresh brick for repairs, though the coal to fire them had to be trucked or barged from a distance.

Because of the shortage of insulated vans and the lengthy trip to the front, supplies were often unuseable when they arrived. Vegetables rotted and tin milk containers rusted. As no sheep or goats were available, and the few existing cattle were needed by the natives for plowing, the Army issued Bully Beef as a substitute for the usual meat ration. In the hot climate, it flowed from the can in a half liquid form. Additionally, the Hindu or Mohammedan soldiers would not eat tinned meat and often went without meat altogether.

Air. The breakthrough in supply support to the army came in 1943/1944 when the Air Force regained air superiority and the arrival in the theater of air combat cargo groups.⁶¹ Air supply though was affected

during the monsoon season by cumulo-nimbus clouds. These clouds often started at 300 feet and went in an unbroken mass to 13,000 to 16,000 feet with violent updrafts and downdrafts, making flying through the mountains extremely dangerous. Nevertheless, air resupply turned around the campaign by allowing the commander to rapidly shift troops and replenish critical supplies. During the Imphal seige, C-47 pilots flying on instruments at the extreme range of their aircraft, often without beacons, delivered 12,000 reinforcements, 14,317,000 pounds of rations (to include 423 tons of sugar, 919 tons of food grains, 5,000 live chickens and 27,500 eggs ((for hospital use only))) 5,250,000 vitamin tablets, 1,303 tons of feed grain, 835,000 gallons of fuel and lubricants, 12,000 bags of mail and 43,475,760 cigarettes. Additionally, 10,000 casualties were evacuated.⁶²

Initially in 1942, Japanese lines of communication were better than those of the British as their lines were shorter and more established. However, as the Japanese advanced, their supply lines lengthened and as the British gained air superiority and concentrated on attacking Japanese supply lines until by late 1944 the Japanese had to supply their army by packmule and human transport.⁶³ This made adequate resupply impossible and drew manpower from the front lines. Being assigned to a resupply unit was considered a punishment for Japanese officers who did not perform well in combat units.⁶⁴

Intelligence

The Japanese intelligence collection plan was designed to acquire knowledge of British plans to counterattack, topographical information in the Manipur sector, and meteorological data concerning the rainy season and its effects.⁶⁵ Japanese intelligence methods varied in effectiveness from excellent to poor. They placed heavy emphasis on patrols and were thus able to obtain accurate information concerning the disposition of forward enemy troops, defenses, armament, and equipment. The effectiveness of these patrols was enhanced because the British failed to conceal their activities from observation.

Supplementary means of intelligence collection including aerial photographic reconnaissance, accounted only negligibly to the Japanese effort.⁶⁶ Enemy reconnaissance aircraft were two-engined and cumbersome,

and flew missions unescorted by fighters. They were easily detected by British radar and many, if not most, were shot down by British fighters.⁶⁷ Japanese attempts to employ agents, including agents from the Indian Traitor Army, were also largely ineffectual. On the whole, Japanese intelligence methods were not largely successful. They were proficient in collecting such information as the location of static defenses or the conditions of roads, but they were not adept at analysis to determine the enemy order of battle or enemy capabilities.⁶⁸

One factor contributing to the lack of good intelligence in the Japanese command may have been the lack of command emphasis. The senior Japanese intelligence officer of Burma Army Headquarters was only a major, whereas his equivalent in the British 14th Army was a brigadier. The Japanese major was far too junior to make his weight felt and influence Japanese planning.⁶⁹ Japanese intelligence officers were also vulnerable to British deception operations. They were quick to believe misleading information supplied to them by double agents, by British prisoners of war, and by British deception units.⁷⁰ As a result, they completely underestimated British strength, fighting qualities, and their ability to reinforce and supply forward bases.⁷¹

Japanese counterintelligence was successful in concealing the attack against Imphal and Kohima. The scope and timing of the Japanese drive came as a complete surprise to the British.⁷² The Japanese took several precautionary measures to maintain this secrecy. They employed natives to work on defense positions and "secret operating teams" spread propaganda. Troop movement in the area was restricted, river crossing operations were concealed, and reconnaissance on the West bank of the Chindwin River was prohibited. Troop movements were performed during the hours of darkness and concealment was achieved by dispersion and by utilizing the cover afforded by dense jungle.⁷³

Japanese camouflage discipline was excellent. According to prisoners of war, the greater part of all movement was done at night, and daylight movement was avoided if possible. All trucks carried camouflage nets and could be well-concealed with the aid of a few bushes. Personal camouflage nets were issued but not often worn. Japanese troops caught in the open by British aircraft would disperse and be perfectly motionless with

their faces pressed to the ground. The Japanese located some headquarters in buildings in villages. Cooking discipline was severe. Hot meals were cooked at dawn and dusk but no fires were usually allowed during the day. All planes were regarded as hostile.⁷⁴

Other Japanese counterintelligence methods were ineffective and detrimental to their own efforts. Japanese prisoners did not hesitate to tell everything they knew because they believed that no "true" Japanese could become a prisoner and that such a prisoner was a traitor who could not return to Japan. Japanese soldiers and officers carried diaries, orders and marked maps into the front line thereby giving the British access to current information.⁷⁵

The Japanese did not treat the native population and Asiatic prisoners of war well. Their arrogance and general brutality antagonized the natives, some of whom could potentially have been recruited as Japanese espionage and sabotage agents (Japanese Inspired Fifth Columnists).⁷⁶

The British relied chiefly on ground patrols and air reconnaissance to keep them advised on the enemy. Six elements or "areas" of the so-called "V Force" were established and tasked to watch the entire 4th Corps front for signs of any Japanese advance. Five of these areas were composed of a headquarters and four platoons - about 140 men, mostly Ghurkas. In addition, each area was allowed to recruit up to a thousand locals, mostly Nagas, who were provided with rifles or shotguns, ammunition, blankets and some supplies. The mission of these "areas" was to patrol the countryside and operate an intelligence network on their own locale. These units were designed primarily to obtain information and not to fight, but they were authorized to attack targets of opportunity which might become available.⁷⁷ The British also established a system of patrol bases, some as large as battalion, to operate forward of a Division or on the flank. These bases were seldom less than a company strong, and were provided with rations, ammunition, and sometimes a medical officer. Semi-permanent shelters were constructed at these bases and careful attention was paid to concealing the position. From these forward bases, the British conducted reconnaissance and fighting patrols. Reconnaissance patrols were led by a non-commissioned officer and numbered up to six men. Their mission was to get information without fighting.

A fighting patrol was larger - up to platoon strong - led by an officer and armed with rifles, grenades, and perhaps a mortar. Its mission was to kill or capture enemy soldiers in order to obtain material, documents, and marked maps. Many of these patrols were highly successful, partially because the Japanese were so noisy during operations.⁷⁸

A number of specially selected officers - British, Australian, Anglo-Burmese, Chinese, Kachins, and other refugees were recruited into a General Headquarters intelligence organization called GSI "Z". Many of these men had been employees of commercial firms in Burma before the war, and were very familiar with the area now occupied by the Japanese. They were formed into pairs and provided with up to eight Burmese to carry, cook and to be general handymen. These intelligence officers and their Burmese assistants then returned to the areas where they lived before the war, hid in the jungle, contacted former employees, and built up an intelligence organization within a specific area.

On the 4th Corps front, there were three of these groups, one in the north in the Homalin area, one in the center, and one in the Kalewa District. Each had a small but powerful wireless set on which it could transmit and receive up to a range of four hundred and fifty miles. It carried its initial supplies into the area, but was resupplied by air drop, as necessary. The officers were provided with gold and gifts with which to reward agents. These clandestine groups supplied much valuable information to British headquarters. Their security was such that none were captured or killed by the Japanese.⁷⁹

Much of the most valuable intelligence available to 4th Corps came from captured documents. The Japanese often carried with them into battle, orders, marked maps and other items of intelligence value. In one case, the haversack of a dead Japanese officer searched by the British contained documents outlining the Japanese plan of attack by 15th Division on the north and northwest of the Manipur plain. Captured documents were translated by linguists assigned to the Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centres (CISDIC). The CISDIC officers, most of whom had lived in Japan, also interrogated prisoners of war for information, although such prisoners were rare. During the Battle of Imphal, only about one

hundred prisoners fell into Japanese hands. The Japanese typically committed suicide before they would allow themselves to be captured unless they were too wounded, starved, or ill to do so. As a result, most interrogations were conducted in hospitals.

4th Corps interrogators spoke to the Japanese in their own language. Almost all required medical treatment, which they received, and they were also treated well otherwise. It did not appear that the Japanese had been given security training. Typically, enlisted men answered questions truthfully and even volunteered information including sketches of positions and dumps, however, junior enlisted men had little information of value.

Japanese officers, on the other hand, were generally very uncooperative, but only four or five were taken during the battle; of these only one was not wounded, and he was suspected of desertion. The officers were prepared to attempt suicide when given the opportunity. All were uninformed of Japanese activities outside their own respective units. In the later stages of the battle, Japanese prisoners who were near starvation made scathing denunciations of their high command, especially General Mutaguchi.

The CISDIC section was located next to the Intelligence Division of 4th Corps Headquarters. This facilitated dissemination of intelligence from captured documents and prisoners of war, and also enabled the CISDIC officers to stay abreast of the current situation and operations plans.⁸⁰

In general, air reconnaissance did not produce the amount of useful information as it did in the other theaters, largely because of the concealment provided to the Japanese by the jungle. On occasion, however, air reconnaissance did produce good results. For example, prior to the Japanese attack, a pilot identified rafts on the Chindwin River which the Japanese had constructed to use as troop ferries. The Royal Air Force also detected some of the increased road movement and repairs along the Japanese lines of communication.

The British pieced together the various bits of information to develop a general picture of the enemy's capabilities and intentions. Their forecast was generally, but not completely accurate: "...the Japanese

15th Army under Lieutenant General Mutuguchi would begin the attack about March 15th with three divisions, the 15th, 31st, and 33rd, with probably another in reserve. His objectives would be, first, Imphal, and second, to break through to the Brahmaputra Valley, thus cutting off the northern front and disrupting the air supply to China. The 33rd Division would attempt to get behind our forward divisions, while some two enemy divisions would cross the Chindwin near Homalim and Thaungdut, making for Imphal via Ukhrul. A regiment, three battalions... would advance against Kohima to cut the road north of Imphal and threaten our Dimapur base."⁸¹

Based on this probable enemy course of action, the British developed three alternative courses of action:

"(1) To anticipate the enemy offensive by crossing the Chindwin and attacking him first.

(2) To hold the Japanese 33rd Division in the Tiddim area and fight with all available forces on the line of the Chindwin hoping to destroy the enemy as he crossed the river, with part of his forces on each bank.

(3) To concentrate IV Corps in the Imphal Plain and fight the decisive battle there on ground of our own choosing."⁸²

The British commander considered the alternatives and chose course of action number 3 - to fight at Imphal. His decision was influenced directly by information provided to him concerning the enemy capabilities and intentions.

Doctrine and Training

British. Doctrinal employment for British forces in the Burma area emphasized combined arms operations. This included the use of infantry, artillery, and tanks during both defensive and offensive actions. Coordinated use of close air support was also utilized when weather permitted. The British tactical organization to allow such combined arms operations was a brigade comprised of three or four infantry battalions, company-sized tank support, and one battery of medium artillery in direct support of each infantry battalion.⁸³ This organizational structure was necessary to seize vital ground and hold it while maximizing the attrition of Japanese forces.

Artillery observation posts and forward observers were employed down to infantry battalion level. Placement of artillery units in close

proximity to infantry was standard with average range of fire missions being 3500 meters. Fire missions were often called to within 25 meters of friendly troops.⁸⁴ The primary communication between forward observers and firing batteries was wireless by radios with land lines and visual signals as alternate communications means. Normal rotation of forward observers between infantry units and artillery batteries was every four days.

Tank support of infantry offensive operations was conducted wherever terrain permitted. Normal tactics would include use of artillery to clear the area surrounding an enemy bunker and then use of tank direct fire to destroy the bunker. Throughout the Imphal-Kohima battle, tank vs tank combat occurred only once.⁸⁵ Tank support in defensive operations was primarily in an anti-armor role.

Status of training within the British 14th Army units engaged in the battle for Imphal-Kohima was good. The bulk of British forces were combat veterans of the previous 1942-43 Burma fighting. The 17th Indian Division was combat hardened and the XXXIII Corps had been actively training in India since 1943. Training in India was characterized by small unit patrolling building to minor offensive operations which were well staged, lead and successful.⁸⁶

Combat support and service support for British units was excellent. Effective use of air, ground, and rail assets was made. A large part of the ground assets consisted of Indian laborers.

Japanese. Japanese doctrine called for the use of artillery in support of infantry. In Burma, the Japanese did not conduct combined arms operations extensively, but rather concentrated their limited tank and artillery assets in the 33rd Division area of operations.⁸⁷ Japanese organization for the battle was a five to eight infantry battalion division with supporting medium artillery. The Japanese 33rd Division also had a tank regiment. Operations consisted of major infantry attacks supported by artillery at night and followed the next day with either a daylight assault or sniping and artillery shelling.⁸⁸ The Indian National Army unit under the Japanese control was not used in any direct attacks but rather to confuse British Indian units.

Training of Japanese units was considered good, since all had seen previous combat. Initiative was weak in the 31st Division, but this was due to poor leadership and not to training. Combat support and service support for the Japanese was almost non-existent throughout the battle. This was largely due to the extremely long line of communication and the lack of air superiority.

Conditions and Morale

British. The British maintained good morale throughout the battle. Much of this is attributed to the intensive combat training undertaken during 1943.⁸⁹ Also, the initial success by British forces in delaying and attriting the Japanese assault contributed to maintaining good morale. With the exception of one short period of time, when water supply was short, British soldiers were supplied daily with rations, ammunition, mail, and rum.⁹⁰ This was cited as another morale builder in the units. British wounded and sick were quickly evacuated to hospital areas. A total of 43,000 non-combatants and 13,000 British casualties were evacuated while 19,000 reinforcements and 13,000 tons of cargo were brought in during the period of 18 April to 30 June 1944.⁹¹

Japanese. Japanese morale at the onset of the battle was high. As the Japanese losses mounted, however, morale began to drop. With the onset of the monsoons in April and the lack of effective resupply, illness in Japanese units increased and morale continued to decrease.⁹² By the completion of the battle, all Japanese units were suffering acutely from morale problems due to large combat and non-combat losses and lack of food.

Leadership

British leadership during the Imphal campaign was characterized by a professional officer corps. The non-commissioned officer corps was composed of Britons, by Indians, or a mixture of both depending where the unit commanders, from division level down, recruited, trained, and fought with their unit throughout the war. This gave them a thorough knowledge of the capabilities of their units and close ties with their men. Most brigade and division commanders had graduated from civilian universities and had fought in W.W.I, Gallipoli, or North Africa.

The Japanese officer corps descended from a warrior class though the needs of the war necessitated the use of officers commissioned from the lower classes. Because of an abundance of general officers, divisions were commanded by Lieutenant Generals with a Major General in charge of the division's infantry troops.

A detailed study of all the commanders would be too lengthy for this paper, but an analysis of the corps and division commanders is helpful to understand the campaign.

The 4th Corps Commander, LTG. G.A.P. Scoones was a division commander in India but had not had an operational command prior to this. During WWI he had served with the Gurkha rifles and had won the military cross for attacking a german machine gun. In 1939 he was director of military operations at GHQ in Delhi. He is described as being slim, 51 years old, athletic, articulate, with a good sense of humor and excellent rapport with his soldiers. Though pressured from higher headquarters to give new officers commands, he refused until they had proven themselves in a staff position first.⁹³

The Japanese 15th Army Commander, LTG. Mataguchi, on the other hand was 56 years old with a strong personality and a fierce temper which often caused his subordinates to hide facts from him. As a result, he did not always know the true situation, and determined to have his own way made poor decisions. As the tide of the campaign went against the Japanese, he relieved all three of his division commanders over a two month period.

The British division commanders, MG Ouvry L. Roberts (23rd Indian Division), MG Tenant Cowan (17th Indian Division), MG D.D. Gracey (20th Indian Division) and MG Harold Briggs (5th Indian Division), appear to be of the same mold as their Corps commander. All were in their late forties and early fifties, athletic, tenacious, and possessing personal courage. All had previous combat service; several had been wounded, and all had either received the Military Cross or the Distinguished Service Order or multiple awards of both. Likewise, descriptions of brigade and battalion commanders read like carbon copies of the division and corps commanders.

Conversely, the Japanese division commanders appear to have been opposites of the 15th Army commander. LTG. Yanagida (33rd Division) is

described as tall for his race with a pale complexion, conscientious, talented, and highly intelligent but too cautious. LTG Yamauchi had polished manners, studied at West Point, served as a military attache in Washington D.C., and is said to have realized the immense potential strength of the Anglo-American alliance and the folly of attacking it haphazardly. The 31st Division commander, LTG Sato was inclined toward the unconventional, possessed an easy manner, unruffled casualness, great courage, and was open-hearted.

British small unit leadership was allowed more flexibility in accomplishing its mission, and junior officers and non-commissioned officers often rose to the occasion when a senior leader was absent or wounded. The Japanese leadership was more rigidly structured, and fear of punishment for failure often led to a lack of initiative on the part of junior officers and NCOs.

Immediate Military Objectives of the British and the Japanese

In early 1944, the mounting shipping losses of the Japanese in the Pacific were beginning to have severe consequences. Unless the Japanese could score some far-reaching strategic success, their armies, strung out over a vast perimeter, faced slow strangulation. The Japanese turned to Burma with the hope of reversing this deteriorating situation. In Burma they felt they could stage an offensive that would give them additional bases of support. If the offensive into Burma succeeded, the British forces would be destroyed; China, completely isolated and driven into a separate peace; India, ripe as the Japanese thought for revolt against the British would likewise fall into their hands.⁹⁴

The British also realized the importance of the Assam theater. The Imphal Plain, some forty by twenty miles in extent, was the only considerable oasis of flat ground in the great sweep of mountains between India and Burma. It lies roughly equidistant from the Brahmaputra Valley and the plains of central Burma, a natural halfway house and staging place for any great military movement in either direction between India and Burma. The British established a railhead at Dimapur and logistic support areas at Kohima and Imphal to support offensive operations into Burma. As long as the Japanese remained on the defense, the great dispersion of Dimapur, Kohima, and Imphal posed no significant

problem; however, in early 1944, when Allied intelligence sources revealed indications of a Japanese offensive, the coordinated defense of Dimapur, Kohima, and Imphal from ground attack became imperative for the British.⁹⁵

The objectives of the Japanese offensive were first, the seizure of Imphal and secondly, the breakthrough to the Brahmaputra Valley, thus cutting off the northern front and disrupting the air supply to China. The Japanese plans for the attack of Imphal included the placing of forces behind the Allied forward divisions, while two Japanese divisions would cross the Chindwin near Homalin and Thaungdut pressing toward Imphal via Ukhrul from the east. A regiment would then advance against Kohima to cut the road north of Imphal and to threaten the railhead at Dimapur. To counterattack the offensive plan of the Japanese, the British decided to concentrate IV Corps in the Imphal Plain and fight the decisive battle there on ground of their own choosing.⁹⁶

SECTION 4:

The Fight

Introduction

The battle of Imphal-Kohima, though fought as a single campaign from March to July 1944 by two opposing armies, in reality consisted of three distinct operations. They were the fight at Imphal, the fight at Kohima, and the air operations in support of the British 14th Army. For this reason this description of the battle of Imphal-Kohima is divided into five separate parts. First, the introduction will set the stage with a description of the disposition of forces and their missions at the beginning of the action. Then the actions at Imphal and Kohima will be described in separate sections from the beginning of the Japanese offensive on 6 March through the defeat of the Japanese and the link-up of British forces from Imphal and Kohima on 22 June. Air support to the 14th Army was one important key to success. As such, it will receive the attention it deserves in its own section. The last section is devoted to an analysis of why the outcome of the battle occurred as it did.

To briefly review the situation on the Burma-India front in early 1944 prior to the battle of Imphal-Kohima, the British were preparing to launch an offensive to retake Burma. The responsibility for the offensive in the north fell to General William Slim's 14th British Indian Army, consisting at the time of the XV Corps in Arakan, the IV Indian Corps in Assam, and General Stilwell's Chinese-American forces in the Ledo area. General Stilwell had already begun to push south down the Hunkawng Valley. To keep pressure off of Stilwell, Lieutenant General Geoffrey A.P. Scoones' IV Corps in Assam had begun pushing toward the Burmese border in an effort to occupy the main forces of the Japanese 15th Army commanded by General Renya Mataguchi.

The Japanese decided to launch a spoiling attack in Assam before the British forces could mass for the offensive. For the spoiling attack Mataguchi had available in his 15th Army the 15th, 31st, 33rd, and 55th Japanese divisions and a two brigade division of the insurgent Indian National Army (INA). This was to be the last major Japanese offensive in India, which they called the Manipur Campaign; launched through the rugged uplands of Burma in March, 1944. (See Map 2) The Japanese 15th Army quickly crossed three divisions over the Chindwin River with the following objectives: (1) occupy Indian soil,

(2) capture the British main logistical base at Imphal, and (3) sever the Bengal-Assam railroad supporting Allied forces farther to the north-east.⁹⁷ If successful, the Japanese would jeopardize British control of India and hinder or cut off China's supply route. Although the Japanese offensive in the nearby Arakan area had been defeated in part by British/American air resupply, their high command continued to plan for operations against the Imphal region. Japanese planning ignored most areas of logistics; rather they relied upon subsisting from captured British supplies at Imphal.

To carry out such a plan, the Japanese moved their divisions into position during January/February 1944. Most units moved only at night and avoided major trails and roads which were few to non-existent. The Japanese 33rd Division concentrated in the area between Tiddim and Kalewa (See Map 2) and opposed the British 17th Indian Division which occupied positions from Tiddim north to Tongzang with forward elements posted out to the Chindwin. (See Map 1) The Japanese 15th Division was in position in the Thaungdut area of the Chindwin River and was opposite forward positions of the British 20th Indian Division. The 31st Japanese Division was farther north and east of the Chindwin poised to assist in the attack on Imphal, but primarily at the ready to project forces north to the Kohima area.

Japanese intelligence was accurate in its depiction of the disposition of the British forces at Imphal and Kohima. The 20th Indian Division was located east of Imphal near the Chindwin River around the town of Tamu. The 17th Indian Division had pushed south to Tiddim. The 23rd Indian Division and the 254th Indian Tank Brigade were located in Imphal in reserve. Kohima had only a small garrison and a newly formed Assam Regiment (Map 1). Based on this disposition, Mataguchi's plan and the missions to his divisions were as follows.

The 55th Division would first attack the XV Corps in Arakan as a deception in an attempt to get General Slim to commit forces there. The 33rd Division as the main attack would cross the Chindwin in the south with the mission to block the 17th Indian Division at Tiddim; then attack north to Imphal. Once this attack was underway, the 31st Division would cross the Chindwin in the north at Homalin to attack and seize Kohima, and the 15th Division would cross the Chindwin at Thaungdut and attack

against the 20th Indian Division to seize Imphal from the east. The Gandhi and Bose Brigade of the INA Division were to follow the 15th Division and serve as occupation troops once objectives were secured.⁹⁸ The intent was to secure the north-south road from Kohima to Imphal to cut this vital line of communication (LOC) which linked the area to the key road and rail network at Dimapur to the west. Though Dimapur was a key town controlling the major north-south railroad supplying most of the 14th Army (to include Stilwell's forces), it was not listed as an initial objective for the 31st Division in the north. Instead, it was a subsequent objective once Kohima was secure. The failure of the Japanese to recognize the criticality of seizing Dimapur early played a key role in their not achieving their goal and will be discussed later.

General Slim's intelligence was equally accurate and forecasted the Japanese offensive. To counter the offensive General Slim considered three options. He could move across the Chindwin with a spoiling attack of his own; he could hold the 33rd Japanese Division at Tiddim and position forces near the Chindwin on the west side in any attempt to destroy the Japanese forces as they crossed the river; or he could pull his units back to Imphal and defend from there and Kohima.⁹⁹

General Slim chose the last option primarily because he did not want to face the extended LOC's that had caused him problems earlier in Burma. If he fought from Imphal, the Japanese would be the ones faced with extended LOCs, a disadvantage aggravated by the fast approaching monsoon season. Having decided on this third option; Slim was faced with only two other considerations: First, when to withdraw the 17th and 20th to Imphal; second, how to defend Kohima. His decision on timing the withdrawal played a key role in the difficulties he experienced at Imphal and will be elaborated upon later. He believed that Kohima would only be attacked by a regimental size force and therefore, that the garrison force and the Assam Regiment would be sufficient for its defense. Kohima's defense would also be aided by the forces positioned at Sangshak and Ukhrul on a principal approach to Kohima; the 49th Brigade from the 23rd Division at Imphal in Sangshak, and the 50th Parachute Brigade (2 battalions), which was part of the reinforcements sent to the area by 11th Army Group, at Ukhrul.

Map 1 shows the position of British forces on 7 March and the planned routes of advance and sectors of the Japanese Divisions. The 55th Division

had already launched its diversionary attack in February against the XV Corps in Arakan. The XV Corps was holding but was not available for action or reinforcement in Assam. Across the front, the Japanese enjoyed an initial superiority in numbers of troops, especially in Kohima. Slim had gained approval from General Gifford at 11th Army Group for more reinforcements into the area, principally the XXXIII Corps and the 2d British Division; but these forces had not yet begun to deploy. The Japanese also enjoyed an advantage in being able to conceal the precise points of attack, which would cause Slim and his subordinate commanders great difficulty, particularly when they had so large a front to secure. The principal advantages for the British were: first, they had complete air superiority in the region; second, for the first time in the Burma theater, the Japanese would face the extended LOCs which had previously plagued the Allied Forces. The combination of these two advantages would make time a combat multiplier for the British and force the Japanese to press for early successes, even when other combat considerations may have dictated a different course of action.

The Battle for Imphal

British forces in the Imphal area were under the overall control of General Slim's 14th Army in Comilla, but were directly subordinate to 4th Corps in Imphal under the command of LTG Scoones. The British had been anticipating a major Japanese thrust towards Dimapur for months, and actually the Japanese had begun operational planning as early as September 1943. General Slim gave (or discussed) three courses of action for LTG Scoones' 4th Corps:¹⁰⁰ (1) anticipate the offensive and cross to the east of the Chindwin River, (2) fight the Japanese on a line running parallel to the Chindwin River but pulling in towards Tiddim in the south, or (3) concentrate 4th Corps in the Imphal area for a decisive battle.

Most of these divisions, especially the 17th Division at Tiddim had been in frequent contact with Japanese patrols and ambushes as part of the Chin Hills offensive that 4th Corps had begun in Nov 1943. The mission of 4th Corps up until the Battle for Imphal had been to (1) protect a 300 mile stretch of the Indo-Burma border, (2) clear the west bank of the Chindwin River, and (3) demonstrate superior strength in the region.

As the date approached for the opening moves of the battle, the Japanese were committed to using methods that had served them well in Mandalay and Burma - attack the lines of communications (LOC's) of Allied Forces, and then destroy isolated units. The build-up of forces in the area to support each others war aims was tremendous. Japanese forces in Burma under control of 15th Army were raised to 100,000 by January of 1944, while the British had a total of 170,000 soldiers of all categories responsive to 4th Corps in Imphal.¹⁰¹

The mission assigned the Japanese divisions necessitated long marches over very difficult terrain and focused on early severing of British LOC's. The Japanese 33rd Division, the best that was available to 15th Army, was to cut the Imphal-Tiddim road, and destroy the 17th and 20th Divisions. The attack on the 17th Division was to begin first, by a week, so as to encourage the British to deploy more forces along the roads and trails south and east of Imphal. This opening would be followed by the 15th Japanese Division cutting the Imphal-Kohima road (See Map 3) and destroying forces of the British 23rd and 20th Divisions. The Japanese 31st Division was to concentrate the majority of its forces along the Kohima-Dimapur axis. However, the swift capture of the logistics base at Imphal was the key to Japanese success, because it contained logistic stocks required to sustain their soldiers.¹⁰²

During the night of 7-8 March, 1944, the Japanese 33rd Division sent elements in motion to begin the attack. The 213th Regiment, plus additional Infantry forces proceeded north up the Kabaw Valley under the command of MG Yamamoto. (See Map 1). The 214th Regiment moved to the north of Tiddim towards milestone 109 on the road to Imphal, while the 215th Regiment went on a flanking movement west and north of Tiddim hoping to reach Bishenpur in the shortest time possible. These moves quickly isolated the 17th Division and focused 4th Corps attention southwards. Meanwhile, elements of the 15th Division were moving, undetected, towards Ukhrul and also in the direction of Nippon Hill along the Imphal-Tamu Road.¹⁰³ The Japanese used excellent concealment and thus earned a significant early advantage through surprise as well as a rapid movement by large units through horrible jungle terrain. Even more threatening, the Japanese were managing to bring forward many artillery pieces and tanks.

The British 17th Division, made up of the 48th Brigade and 63rd Brigade, totalled 16,000 troops, 2,500 vehicles, and 3,500 mules.¹⁰⁴ As such, it was pretty much tied to whatever trails and roads were available.

The Japanese 214th Regiment struck hard at elements of the 63rd Brigade. The Japanese were able to establish a roadblock on 16 March 1944, at Milestone 132 only 3 days after 17th Division had been ordered to withdraw north to Imphal.¹⁰⁵ The intensity of the Japanese initial attack coupled with indecision by 4th Corps resulted in 17th Division remaining in forward positions a few days too long. The plan by 4th Corps had called for their movement, but the British proved reluctant to give up ground to the enemy. They were focused on terrain rather than the enemy at this early stage of the battle. Once the battle was joined it became a deadly footrace along the road to Imphal. 48th Brigade proceeded northward with 63rd Brigade conducting a rear guard action. Initial strength of the 214th Regiment had been placed at about 4,000 combat soldiers.

LTG Scoones needed to insure the best possible withdraw northward of the 17th Division so he ordered the 23rd Division to assist. The 23rd Division promptly dispatched their 37th Brigade towards Tiddim on 14th March, 1944, the same day that the 215th Regiment reached the road to Imphal. Orders were given for the 37th Brigade to proceed south of Hengtam.¹⁰⁶ By 16 March, 1944, the 37th Brigade was being heavily engaged and had been joined by the 49th Brigade of the 23rd Division. Both these brigades were then cut off from Imphal and ground supply when Japanese units from the 214th Regiment cut the road at Milestone 72 (72 miles south of Imphal). Supplies to these units were then brought in by air. Meanwhile, the 48th Brigade further south formed a secure "box" through which the remainder of 17th Division passed as it headed northwards. It was not until 28 March 1944 that elements of the 23rd Division and 17th Division linked up. Casualties were mounting on both sides, and while the British were shortening their LOC's, the Japanese continued to lengthen theirs.

The 20th Division in the vicinity of Tamu (See Map 1) had had similar plans to withdraw closer to Imphal. Japanese tanks had been spotted in the lower Kabaw Valley as early as the first week of March. Initially, the 100th Brigade, with a supporting squadron of 16 heavy tanks, was deployed 10 miles south of Tamu. The 32nd Brigade remained further to the east towards Sittaung, while the 80th Brigade had been deployed a few

miles to the north with positions reaching to the Chindwin River.¹⁰⁷

The Japanese attack up the Kabaw Valley cut communications between the 32d Brigade and 100th Brigade. However, all the brigades of the 20th Division knew they had to withdraw through Moreh and occupy positions east of Palel, which would also retain an airfield for their resupply if it became necessary. By 19 March, the majority of the 32d Brigade had reached Moreh and the 80th and 100th Brigades also proceeded to withdraw now under attack from elements of the 15th Division as well, which had gone into battle on the night of 15-16 March 1944.

By 22 March 1944, the 80th Brigade still had a battalion 8 miles north of Tamu. Employing large quantities of mortars and artillery on Japanese positions, the 80th Brigade left this area for one east of Palel. The 100th Brigade followed on 25 March 1944 followed by the 32d Brigade. The 32d Brigade like the 48th north of Tiddim, had formed a "box" through which the other two brigades passed to the west.¹⁰⁸ Although terrain limited most movement to within a few feet of the road, the brigades moved in an orderly fashion towards Palel. The Japanese conducted strong night attacks on the "box" of the 32d Brigade; however, when the 32d Brigade withdrew they conducted a night exit, left a few gunners firing and escaped from under Japanese noses without being further engaged. By 1 April 1944, 80th Brigade and 100th Brigade were in position from Sheram Pass to Nippon Hill, while the 32d Brigade was in Palel as the 4th Corps reserve.

From 19-29 March 1944, the 5th Indian Division was flown into Imphal from Arakan. Its 123rd Brigade landed first and moved into positions northeast of Imphal only 10 miles short of Litan. The 123rd Brigade made extensive use of barbed wire between battalion positions as well as anti-personnel mines, machine gun teams, and tanks, two squadrons of which were deployed to the rear of the 123rd Brigade's positions. 9th Brigade, 5th Indian Division, went into positions along the road leading north to Kohima. Their positions at Kanglatongbi did not prevent elements of the Japanese 67th Regiment (15th Division) from cutting this vital road on 29 March 1944. Imphal was now cut-off from ground supply and for all practical purposes was encircled by the 15th Division and 33rd Division of the 15th Japanese Army.

The 5th Indian Division continued to build up strength opposite elements of the 51st, 60th, and 67th Regiments north and northeast of Imphal.

On 6 April 1944, 9th Brigade, 5th Indian Division, linked up with 123rd Brigade.¹⁰⁹

The destruction of the 50th Parachute Brigade at Sangshak, eight miles south of Ukhrul, was a primary objective of the southern most element of the 31st Division, the 58th Regiment. The determined stand of this unit, the 50th Parachute Brigade, from 22-27 March 1944, gave extra time to LTG Scoones to reorganize positions and bring forward the 5th Indian Division. This fight resulted in high casualties on both sides. The British made excellent use of their 3.7 inch guns, while at the same time suffering shortages of water, rations, ammunition, and officers; the latter being killed or wounded at a very high rate. It appears that the British officers, especially those in Gurkha units, stood out to Japanese soldiers who were encouraged to shoot them first. Some good fortune did result as on 22 March 1944 a search of a dead Japanese officer uncovered the future plans of both the 15th and 31st Divisions. This lack of security awareness (taking plans forward into battle) was typical of the Japanese throughout their Burma campaign.¹¹⁰

The Japanese ability to move artillery over difficult terrain paid big dividends in late March and early April as the 33rd Division was able to employ its 75 mm guns on the withdrawing 17th Division and the relieving 23rd Division. By 30 March, the 17th Division had suffered 800 casualties. Throughout the first week of April, the 49th Brigade and 37th Brigade, 23rd Division, also suffered from the Japanese's 75 mm guns as they were forced back towards Bishenpur.

By 4 April 1944, all divisions of the 4th Corps were in contact in and around the Imphal Plain. The Imphal Plain stretches 50 miles north to south and averages 21 miles in width from east to west. (See Map 4) It is surrounded by peaks over 5,000' and was a logistics center serviced by good roads and six airfields. The British Divisions took up positions as follows: 5th Division located at Kanglatongbi and Kameng, 20th Division concentrated around Shenam on the approach to Imphal from Tamu, 23rd Division posted south, vicinity of Bishenpur and 17th Division was in reserve. They were opposed by the Japanese 33rd Division in the south and the Japanese 15th Division in the north.

LTC Scoones decided to destroy the enemy 15th Division first. His early planning called for this operation to commence on 12 April 1944.¹¹¹ He saw as critical to his operation that only 2 divisions be allowed to operate away from Imphal at any one time. However, he was always willing to also commit the better part of the 254th Tank Brigade away from Imphal as the need arose - which was normally undertaken to overcome enemy bunker defenses. Further planning by 4th Corps called for the 20th Division and 17th Division to hold Japanese forces east and south of current positions on a line from Bishenpur to Shenam, while the 5th Division and 23rd Division attack the scattered 15th Division north toward Kohima and northeast towards Ukhrul.

The earlier deployment of 5th Division made this counter offensive possible; however, the subsequent moves in early April were made as reactions to continual Japanese attacks spearheaded by the 51st Regiment of the 15th Division. The British 123rd Brigade made extensive use of barbed wire and artillery fire as well as two squadrons of tanks to hold off Japanese night attacks on 4 April 1944. Other Japanese elements infiltrated to the rear of the 123rd Brigade while the 9th Brigade was heavily engaged north of Imphal at Nungshigum (Hill 3833). These separate attacks by the Japanese 15th Army hint at frustration by the Japanese for not having taken Imphal early on in the battle which was now in its 3rd week and almost a month old for the 33rd Division.

The Japanese occupation of Nungshigum prompted a British counterattack on 13th April. It was a good combined arms effort with CAS flown by Vengeances and Hurribombers, all of 5th Division artillery (88 guns) and almost 2 regiments of tanks. The tanks were employed 3 per assault company.¹¹² The fighting was savage. Due to slopes that the tanks had to climb, all tank officers were hit as they had to expose themselves to direct the tanks in action. However, by 14th April, 5th Division had secured the high ground north of Imphal and Japanese forces were never again able to advance as close to the logistical center. They had reached their peak. The British were able to turn back this dangerous threat through the concentrated efforts of the R.A.F., tanks, artillery, and infantry. The Japanese were hindered by piecemealing their attacks north of Imphal and were already showing signs of fatigue and medical shortages. This would prove even more critical

as "the lower standard of medical care of the Japanese also means that a larger proportion of their battle and disease casualties die(d) than among Allied Forces. The absolute death rate is (was) increased also by the practice at times of the Japanese in killing the seriously ill and wounded when the combat forces retire(d) and they (could not) cannot evacuate them.¹¹³

15th Division Headquarters was in vicinity of Kasom (See Map 1), and the mission was given to 1st Brigade, 23rd Division to move against it along the road to Ukhrul. 1st Brigade travelled eastwards thus allowing 37th Brigade, 23rd Division, to reach Kasom first. 49th Brigade, 23rd Division, held open the road back to Imphal, as remnants of the 51st Regiment, 15th Division continued to operate in this area.

Meanwhile, the 213th Regiment of the 33rd Japanese Division supported by a regiment of tanks, continued to oppose the 20th Division forward of the Sheman saddle position. (See Map 1) Control of this position also gave control of the nearby airfield at Palel. The Japanese needed this position to continue their LOC along to Imphal. On 1 April, fighting began for control of this area, and it centered on Nippon Hill forward of Shenam Pass. As the 80th and 100th Brigades of the 20th Division were moving back, the Japanese of the 33rd Division were able to take Nippon Hill inflicting and taking heavy casualties among NCO's and officers. The Japanese were to hold Nippon Hill until July. This was the closest the Japanese got to Imphal along this route of approach. This allowed Palel airfield to remain in British control, further aiding the re-supply of 4th Corps by air efforts. This area of the front soon resembled WWI battlefields. Massive amounts of artillery fire and barbed wire were used and the British rotated troops weekly out of front line positions.

With the battle stalemated in the southeast, LTC Scoones decided to swap positions of the 20th and 23rd Divisions in mid-May. The 20th Division was to oppose the 15th Division near Ukhrul.

The British 32d Brigade and 49th Brigade had both been used as 4th Corps reserve. This resulted in their being used in positions around Bishenpur, south of Imphal. In this sector, the Japanese 33rd Division continued to employ their 214th and 215th Regiments. Due to terrain, either mountainous jungle or soil too wet to operate on, both sides were

restricted to roads and vulnerable to air attack. However, by 14 April 1944, 33rd Division was able to move its headquarters to within a few miles of Bishenpur, moving along the road from Tiddim.¹¹⁴ Counterattacks by the British 32d Brigade were confused due to poor coordination of CAS especially on 22 April. Also, the Japanese 213th Regiment made excellent use of anti-tank fire and as the 254th Tank Brigade could not send more tanks forward, the British called off the attack.

By the end of April, it is estimated that the 33rd Division was down to 1/3 of its strength as reported in early March. British artillery and CAS continued to harass Japanese positions. British units also were taking heavy losses, and subsequently the 63rd Brigade was brought forward to relieve the 32d Brigade at Bishenpur. This rotation of units was a luxury not available to the Japanese 15th Army. It was to further frustrate their attempts to capture Imphal.

In mid-May, the 17th Division was to attempt extended operations south of Bishenpur to interdict the Japanese LOC's. The 32d Brigade was to mislead the Japanese into fearing an attack west of Bishenpur while the 63rd Brigade swept ridges west of the road to Tiddim, and the 48th Brigade conducted a daring flanking movement via Palel, Shuganu - Torbung (See Map 1). The objective was to set up a road block. The mission was accomplished and a Japanese supply column was destroyed on 16 May 1944; however, 63rd Brigade could not link up with 48th Brigade, so the 48th conducted a dangerous withdrawal that lasted approximately 2 weeks. The 63rd Brigade fought a depleted enemy but did not pursue its objective with the enthusiasm normally seen in British Brigades during this battle.

The plight of 214th and 215th Regiments worsened as casualties increased in May. By the end of May, 33rd Division Headquarters had pulled out of the Bishenpur area, and the division left behind thousands of dead. Casualties were not much better for the 15th Division with its headquarters near Litan, northeast of Imphal.

The 20th Division continued to attack towards Ukhrul while the 5th Division moved northwards towards Kohima. The 89th Brigade was flown in and joined 5th Division along the road to Kohima. As the Japanese used excellent defensive terrain to its best advantage, the 123rd Brigade was also required in this area. The 9th Brigade also joined in, but in one month

the entire force only advanced 16 miles. Fatigue had evidently set in among the survivors of two months of hard fighting in mountainous jungle. Regardless, the 15th Japanese Army Commander, LTG Mataguchi, relieved all three division commanders between May and June. This further compounded mounting Japanese problems. The survival of the 15th Army was at stake.¹¹⁵

From 13-16 May, the 23rd Division actually moved into Shenam positions as the 20th Division pulled out. The 49th Brigade acted as division reserve from its positions near Palel airfield astride the road to Imphal while the 1st and 37th Brigades occupied forward positions north and south of the road to Moreh, respectively. (See Map 1) Fighting in this area continued to be the heaviest of the entire Imphal area.

The 5 battalions of the 37th Brigade were rotated between positions and supported by anti-aircraft weapons, machine gun teams, and a troop of tanks. The Japanese, from positions near Nippon Hill, kept up constant shelling on British positions. Japanese shelling by medium artillery was extremely accurate. The majority of the time the British forces were restricted to their trenches with rotting bodies beyond their reach exposed to the elements. This area continued to look like a WWI battlefield.¹¹⁶

The Japanese 51st and 213th Regiments continued attacks into mid-May. After attacking without visible success from May 20-24, there was a two-week lull in the battle as neither side was in shape to mount an attack.

The 1st Brigade actions north of Shenam in early June had resulted in high casualties on both sides, but little ground was gained as a result. It was significant, however, that with British taking of the peak "Ben Nevis" on 24 May, the Japanese did not counterattack for four days. This was welcomed by the British, and probably further signified Japanese weakness due to non-replacement of combat losses. As had happened in the other areas of battle around Imphal, as well as in the area east of the Shenam Pass, the Japanese were well past their high-water mark of the campaign. In fact, the last Japanese attack on Scraggy, a peak along the road to Tamu, was launched by remnants of their 213th Regiment, 33rd Division on 9 June. They employed an excellent artillery preparation, followed it with soldiers loaded with grenades, but the British counterattacked with infantry/tank teams to defeat Japanese soldiers in bunkers. The British victory was costly, but it signaled the last major attack in this sector.

The situation for the Japanese 15th Army was nearly hopeless. The new 33rd Division commander, LTC Tanaka, issued the following order to his soldiers on 2 June:

Now is the time to capture Imphal. Our death-defying infantry group expect certain victory when it penetrates the main fortress of the enemy. The coming battle is a turning point. It will decide the success or failure of the Greater East Asia War. You men have got to be fully in the picture as to what the present position is; regarding death as something lighter than a feather you must tackle the job of definitely capturing Imphal.

That's why it must be expected that the Division will be almost annihilated. I have confidence in your courage and devotion, and believe that you will do your duty. But should any delinquencies occur, you have got to understand that I shall take the necessary action.

In the front line rewards and punishments must be given on the spot without delay. A man, for instance, who puts up a good show should have his name sent in at once. On the other hand, a man guilty of any misconduct should be punished at once in accordance with the Military Code.

Further, in order to keep the honor of his unit bright a Commander may have to use his sword as a weapon of punishment; exceedingly shameful though it is to have to shed the blood of one's own soldiers on the battlefield.

Fresh troops with unused rifles have now arrived and the time is at hand - the arrow is ready to leave the bow. The infantry group is in high spirits, afire with valor and dominated by one thought and one thought only: the duty laid upon them to annihilate the enemy.

On this one Battle rests the fate of the Empire.
All officers and men, fight courageously.¹¹⁷

When the above order was issued, the 33rd Division had been engaged in the fight for Imphal for 87 days without major success. Casualties and disease were high and morale was getting lower. The wounded were

forced back into combat. The Japanese commanders, looking at casualty lists and situation maps, were being forced by 15th Army and higher headquarters to continue sending troops into a hopeless situation.

Throughout the second and third weeks of June, the remains of the 214th Regiment, 33rd Division, tried to push through Bishenpur. The British, able to put fresh units into line, held off the 214th, so the 33rd Division sent in small elements of the 215th Regiment as well. The British 17th Division held their positions with infantry machine gun teams, a few tanks, and overwhelming artillery fire.

The Japanese 214th Regiment, not getting the word to withdraw until early July, was down to 460 men from a pre-battle strength of 4,000.¹¹⁸ This situation was repeated in the other Japanese regiments around Imphal. They had all been bled white.

The seige of Imphal was raised on 22 June when the 9th Brigade, 5th Division, broke through the final roadblock on the road to Kohima and Simapur at Milestone III. As usual, it was a fierce fight as the Japanese had withstood repeated attack on the previous six days.

The British 4th Corps had won a clear tactical victory over the Japanese 15th and 33rd Divisions. They had done so by adhering to pre-battle plans and had conducted a fairly orderly withdraw towards Imphal in March. This concentration of forces, and the subsequent fly-in of additional units from Arakan, had enabled LTC Scoones to focus on the destruction of enemy forces. He did not have to protect his LOC's as he possessed none!

The Japanese, intent on an early capture of Imphal for tactical, political, and logistical reasons either underestimated British air superiority or didn't consider it at all. Had the Japanese been content with cutting off one British division at a time, such as the 17th Division in forward positions at Tiddim, they might have achieved a measure of success in terms of enemy destroyed. As it turned out, they occupied terrain taken from the British, but from the beginning of the battle their forces were spread too thinly.

Kohima

Disposition of Forces at the Beginning of the Action

As the northern division of the Japanese 15th Army the mission of the 31st, commanded by Lieutenant General (LTG) Kotoku Sato, was as follows: cross the Chindwin River and drive straight to and seize Kohima; block the all-weather road forming the principal line of communication (LOC) from Dimapur in the west through Kohima, then south through Mission to Imphal; then defend Kohima and dispatch one element to pursue the enemy to the west and to seize Dimapur.¹¹⁹

For his mission LTG Sato re-organized his three regiment division into three assault units. The right assault unit (RAU) consisted of the 3rd Battalion of the 138th Infantry Regiment, a battery of artillery, a platoon of engineers, and medical support. The mission of the right assault unit was to cross the Chindwin at Tamanthi, then advance to Priphema west of Kohima via Layshi, Pakekedzuni; Nerhema, and Khabvuma to block the Dimapur-Kohima road.

The center assault unit (CAU) consisted of an advance guard and a main body and was the main attack. The advance guard contained the 138th Regiment (less the 3rd Battalion), a battalion of artillery (less one battery), a company of engineers (less one platoon), and medical support. The main body contained the division headquarters, the 124th Infantry Regiment, the division's regimental artillery headquarters and one battalion of artillery, the division engineer battalion (-), medical support, and the division's support regiment. The center assault unit was to cross the Chindwin between Maungkan and Kawya, then advance on Kohima through Fort Keary, Somra, and Jessami.

The left assault unit (LAU) consisted of an infantry group headquarters under the 31st Division Deputy Commander, Major General (MG) Miyazaki, the 58th Infantry Regiment, a battalion of artillery, a company of engineers, and medical support. Its mission was to cross the Chindwin south of Homalin, then advance to Kohima via Ukhrul, Kharasom, and Mao-Sonsang. An element of the left assault unit was to drive south from Mao-Songsang and block the north-south road between Kohima and Imphal at Karong.¹²⁰ See Map 5.

Preparation and supply build-up for the 31st Division's attack had been hindered by two factors: first, LOC's had been severely damaged and harassed by Allied air attacks; second, priority for resupply was going to the 18th Division fighting Stilwell's forces in the Hukawng corridor. This fact coupled with limited transportation assets (3000 horses and 5000 oxen, for which only three days of forage could be carried; nearly no motor vehicles), the rugged terrain he would face across the Chindwin and the lightly defended objective, led Sato to make the following decisions which limited his combat power. They would carry rations and ammunition for only three weeks operations. Mountain guns, antitank guns, and mortars would be carried, but the 105 mm howitzers would be left behind. Half of the infantry guns and other heavy weapons of the infantry regiments would be left behind also.¹²¹

During January and February the forces of the 31st Division were repositioned on the east side of the Chindwin according to the plan of attack. All elements were in position by the first week of March, as were the rest of the divisions of the 15th Army to the south.

One week after the 33rd Division began its attack on Imphal, on the night of 15-16 March, the 31st Division began its attack to Kohima by crossing the Chindwin in eight columns on a 40 mile front.

The British forces which initially faced the advance of the 20,000 man 31st Division were on the surface woefully inadequate. As mentioned earlier, General Slim, the 14th Army Commander, had estimated that Kohima and Dimapur would be attacked by no more than a regimental size force. The Kohima garrison could muster a total of about 1000 men who were capable of fighting. This included convalescents, rear-echelon soldiers and some state police. The 1st Assam Regiment (about battalion strength), which had already been fighting during the IV Corps push to the Chindwin was now located about thirty miles east of Kohima around the village of Jessami. Dimapur had no garrison at all. No reinforcements for Kohima or Dimapur had as yet been requested. Most were programmed for Imphal to reconstitute a reserve for the IV Corps.

General Slim almost immediately recognized his error in underestimating the size force that would attack toward Kohima and Dimapur. He was not so concerned with losing Kohima, but if Dimapur fell it would seriously

jeopardize operations throughout the theater. The relief of Imphal would be much more difficult; the airfields in the Brahmaputra Valley, which supported air operations over the "China Hump" would be threatened; the main supply route to Stilwell and China would be cut;¹²² perhaps worst of all, the Japanese would gain the existing supply stocks at Dimapur and have a base for future operations into India.

The Opening Moves

This section covers the period from 15 March when the 31st Division crossed the Chindwin to 7 April, by which time the 31st Division had arrived at Kohima, had seized a major portion of the town and had begun to encircle it.

The Japanese began their push to Kohima on 15 March along the planned routes of advance shown on Map 5. They met only weak resistance on the west bank and were able to force the advance according to their plans. The terrain, however, made the going extremely slow.

By 21 March, the 58th Regiment with the left assault unit (LAU) reached Ukhrul and had made contact with the 50th Parachute Brigade positioned primarily around Sangshak to the south of Ukhrul. Although Sangshak was outside the 31st Division sector, MG Miyazaki, commanding the LAU, believed he could easily defeat the British force and ordered an attack on 22 March. Retaining some focus on his primary mission, he simultaneously dispatched the 1st Battalion of the 58th to continue to Kohima. It took until 26 March to defeat the two battalions of the 50th Parachute Brigade, and Miyazaki lost 16 percent of his force doing it. Sangshak could easily have been bypassed with little or no effect on the 31st Division's mission.

The 1st Battalion was more successful, departing the Ukhrul area on March 24, and after defeating a small force from the Kohima garrison, it cut the Imphal-Kohima road on 30 March at Tuphema, 15 miles south of Kohima.

The advances of the Right and Center Assault Units (RAU/CAU) were delayed and harassed from the time they crossed the Indian Border by elements of the 1st Assam Regiment (battalion strength). Operating in an economy of force mission, its companies, though separated, conducted a very successful, coordinated delay. The 1st Assam took heavy casualties,

but inflicted the same on the advancing Japanese. They never lost cohesion while conducting their delay. They concentrated their efforts along the routes leading to Kohima from Jessami and Kharasom. (Map 5).

The 1st Assam's delaying action, which impeded the RAU and CAU, and MG Miyazaki's "side-show" operation at Sangshak prevented the 31st Division from attacking Kohima in force until the first week of April. This extra time proved invaluable for General Slim and allowed him to take the actions necessary to recover from his mistake in underestimating the strength of the Japanese attack on Kohima.

He first diverted one brigade (161st) of the 5th Indian Division, which was being flown to Imphal as reinforcements, to Dimapur. The 161st completed its fly-in from Arakan during the last days of March. He gave a warning order to the 7th Indian Division, also in Arakan, to be prepared to follow the 5th into Assam, also by air transport.

From 11th Army Group, Slim requested and received Headquarters XXXIII Corps (LTC Stopford commanding), the 2d British Division and Wingate's 23rd Brigade (Chindits). In addition to these specific reinforcements for Kohima, 11th Army Group and the entire Indian Command were making plans to continue to pour forces and supplies into the Assam/Arakan area to reinforce Slim's efforts. They would continue to arrive throughout the battle.

Deciding that Imphal and Kohima were too much for one corps commander to handle, Slim next took the Kohima-Dimapur-Jorhat area from the operational control of Scoones' IV Corps and placed all forces under the temporary command of 202 Line of Communication (LOC) Area, commanded by Ranking.

As soon as 161st Brigade closed in Dimapur, Slim directed them to Kohima. They moved out of Dimapur on 29 March. In his written directive to Ranking, however, Slim had told him to hold Dimapur at all costs, to reinforce Kohima with 161st Brigade and to be prepared to receive large reinforcements at Dimapur. He stressed the over-riding importance of holding Dimapur. At the time, Ranking had only 161st Brigade to add to the meager forces previously mentioned with which to carry out his task. Considering Dimapur his main effort and having received false reports of Japanese forces moving on Dimapur, Ranking ordered the 161st Brigade to return to defensive positions 8 miles south of Dimapur at Nichugard no later than 31 March.

As Slim took action to strengthen his forces at Kohima, the regiments of the 31st continued to advance on the small mountain village. The main body of the LAU reached Mao-Songsang about 10 miles south of Kohima, on 3 April. From here Miyazaki split his LAU force (the 58th Regiment), sending the 1st Battalion 13 miles west to Pulomi, the 3rd Battalion to the east to approach Kohima from the southeast from Chakhabama. He would drive up the Imphal-Kohima road with the balance of the LAU (Map 6).

The 3rd Battalion, 58th Regiment was the first force to reach Kohima. On the night of 4-5 April, they conducted a surprise attack and seized the town, occupying positions on Garrison Hill (Map 7). Having experienced little difficulty in taking the town, Miyazaki believed all forces had been withdrawn from Kohima. Therefore, rather than consolidating his gains, he ordered the 3rd Battalion to advance north to Cheswema. They left on 6 April. The British immediately reoccupied Garrison Hill; this time to stay. The Japanese would pay heavily for this error in judgement. That same day, Miyazaki sent the 2d Battalion to retake the hill. They were unsuccessful. More efforts to retake Garrison Hill would ensue; none were ever successful; each would result in heavy Japanese casualties.

Meanwhile, on 3 April, LTC Stopford arrived in Assam at Jorhat (60 miles north of Dimapur on the Assam railway) and established his XXXIII Corps Headquarters there. On 4 April, he took control of the operation from Ranking and 202 LOC area. His orders from Slim were: to cover the concentration of his corps as far forward as possible; to secure the Dimapur base; to reinforce and hold Kohima; to protect the Assam railway and China route airfields in the Brahmaputra Valley (as far as possible without jeopardizing the first three tasks).¹²³

Stopford's first move was to order the 161st back to Kohima. They left Nichugard on the morning of 5 April. The Japanese, however, as stated before, had already taken the town and had begun to encircle. 161 was only able to push one unit, the 4th Battalion Royal West Kent (RWK) Regiment, into Kohima. That battalion joined the garrison the evening of 5 April. The remainder of the Brigade took up positions astride the Dimapur-Kohima Road five miles northwest of Kohima centered on Jotsoma.

The 31st Division Commander, Sato, was confident that Kohima and Garrison Hill would be retaken in short order. He therefore concentrated

his efforts on isolating the town and the battlefield, particularly to prevent reinforcements from the northwest.

He let Miyazaki focus on the fight at Garrison Hill. Miyazaki recalled the 3rd Battalion, 58th Regiment from Cheswema. Sato reinforced him with 1st Battalion 138th Regiment, the lead element of the CAU which arrived at Kohima on 7 April.

To isolate Kohima, Sato sent the 138th Regiment (-) south then west to cut the road to Dimapur and block the western approach to Kohima at Zubza. He ordered the 124th Regiment (-) to move to Cheswema to block the approach from the north. The 3rd Battalion 124th Regiment was kept in Kohima to defend the town proper while Miyazaki attempted to retake Garrison Hill.

On 7 April, 138th Regiment (-) surrounded 161 units in the vicinity of Jotsoma and dispatched a reinforced company to Zubza. Map 8 shows the disposition of forces on 7 April as the opening moves were completed. The Kohima garrison with the addition of 4th Battalion RWK now totaled about 3000 men. They were closely interspersed with superior Japanese forces. The 161 Brigade (-) was cut off to the north. The 31st Division was fast encircling the town and appeared to have sufficient forces to clear it in short order.

But reinforcements coming by rail and air were beginning to build up in Dimapur. The lead elements of the 2d British Division arrived 2 April. 11th Army Group had given Slim a regiment of tanks and the 268th Indian Motorized Brigade. He added them to the force list for Stopford's XXXIII Corps.

The march and fighting to get to Kohima had depleted Sato's 31st Division. He had lost nearly all of his oxen and about half of his horses to a combination of the rough terrain and lack of forage. His men were exhausted and suffering from malnutrition. He had lost several hundred men to sickness, particularly beriberi. He was dangerously low on supplies with long LOCs behind him and no air support available.

Even so, the Japanese appeared to have won the first round. Kohima was surrounded. He had captured the only water supply in the town. His success was due largely to Slim's underestimation of the size enemy force

attacking Kohima and to Ranking's having recalled the 161 Brigade from Kohima. In retrospect, this error also may have belonged to Slim. He apparently did not adequately transmit his intent to Ranking. But Japanese mistakes left some light at the end of the tunnel for Slim. Had Miyazaki adhered to the principal of objective and mass, he could have attacked Kohima as early as 30 March with an entire regimental combat team. Instead, he chose to divert his attention to the unnecessary assault on Sangshak. That cost Miyazaki and Sato dearly in men and, more importantly, time.

The more critical mistake was the Japanese high command's failure to recognize Dimapur as the Clausewitzian "center of gravity" for the British forces. It is apparent that Sato also never saw the criticality of taking Dimapur. The 15th Army Commander, Mataguchi, did see the importance of Dimapur and also saw an excellent opportunity to take it. In fact, he gave Sato orders to contain Kohima and move the bulk of his force on to seize Dimapur. Before Sato could execute the order, however, General Kawabe, Mataguchi's superior as the commander of the Burma Area Army, countermanded the order. He told Mataguchi that taking Dimapur was "not within the strategic objectives of the 15th Army."¹²⁴ This one error very possibly saved the day for the entire plan for reoccupying Burma.

The Battle for Kohima

After the opening moves had been completed, the Battle for Kohima had no really distinct phases. It became a series of moves and counter-moves fighting for isolated bits of terrain. This was due primarily to the opposing commanders' interpretation of their tasks. Sato was trying to consolidate his final objective of Kohima. LTC Stopford was at first, focused on defending Dimapur. Stopford did immediately use offensive action against Kohima as part of his defense, but it would be inaccurate to say that he considered himself to be on the offensive during April. For this reason, rather than phasing the operation, this description of the Battle for Kohima will outline the events chronologically from Stopford's first moves in early April through 31 May when Sato ordered the withdrawal of his 31st Division in direct opposition to Mataguchi's order.

Certain conditions and traits affecting the relative combat power of the opposing forces were constant throughout the battle. To avoid

redundancy or repetition these are outlined below. The reader will recognize most of them as they surface during the description of events.

1. After his advance on Kohima, during which the 124th Regiment performed the function, Sato never again programmed a reserve force. XXXIII Corps on the other hand planned for a reserve at all times, even when the deployment to Dimapur was incomplete and Stopford had few forces.

2. The British enjoyed complete air superiority. They made effective use of air attacks, concentrating on dug in defensive positions and enemy communications sites, and also of air support for logistics and transport. The Japanese had virtually no air support.

3. Sato was extremely lacking in initiative. He never took advantage of opportunities. In particular, he never used the Japanese skill at infiltration and attacking rear areas. He and his subordinate commanders confined their attacks to frontal assaults.

4. The British enjoyed solid logistical support. Sato got no support from 15th Army. He received neither supplies nor reinforcements throughout the battle. Conversely, Stopford was so well supported that he could even afford to pull formations from the battle area and return them to Dimapur for short periods of "R & R" in a reserve role.

5. The British had a complete advantage in armor. Sato had none. The terrain, made worse by rain, restricted the use of armor to operating only on roads and point attacks on reinforced positions, but when they could be used they were effective.

6. The 31st Division showed the typical skill and fanaticism in the defense that had characterized earlier operations against the Japanese. They were masters at preparing strong, well camouflaged and mutually supporting positions. You had to destroy each position to the last man before it could be considered neutralized.

7. Soldiers on both sides proved themselves to be courageous, tenacious, impervious to extreme hardship, and willing.

Neither General Slim nor LTC Stopford realized that the Japanese high command had restricted Mataguchi and Sato from taking Dimapur. They still believed Dimapur to be the primary objective of the 31st Division; that assumption was supported by simple military logic. This being the

case, Stopford developed the XXXIII Corps plans. First, he would stop the Japanese advance on Dimapur and defend it. Simultaneously, he would use Dimapur as his base to build up forces, but he would concentrate the forces northeast of the town so that they would be clear of an attack on the base; and at the same time would be in position to counterattack should the Japanese attack. He would immediately reinforce Kohima, which he did by sending 161 Brigade back to the town as previously mentioned. He would then use one brigade (23rd Brigade, Chindits) to attack Kohima and set up a blocking position east of the town to cut the Japanese LOC to the Chindwin River and check their infiltration toward the Assam railway. The 2d British Division would be the principal force for defending Dimapur. Stopford planned to use his remaining forces to accomplish his last task of protecting the Assam rail and air LOC.¹²⁵

It is interesting to note that at the outset the main effort is still the defense of Dimapur, rather than attacking Kohima to destroy the 31st Division. That would change as soon as Slim and Stopford realized that Sato was not going for Dimapur; that he would continue to reinforce failure at Kohima with suicidal frontal attacks and would never use initiative to take advantage of his opportunity to hit Dimapur.

By 11 April, the headquarters and two brigades (5th and 6th) of the 2d British Division had closed in on Dimapur. The third brigade (4th) was following closely. On 12 April the 23rd Lorrie Brigade (Chindits) arrived at Jorhat. Refer to Maps 5 and 9 as operations in April are discussed.

Stopford put the 2d Division into action immediately. He gave the commander, 2d Division operational control of all forces forward of Dimapur. The lead brigade (5th) moved out to join 161 Brigade, which was still held up and virtually surrounded west of Kohima. 23rd Brigade (LRP) was directed to advance south from Jorhat to strike to the east of Kohima and cut the Japanese LOC to the Chindwin River.

Because of the Japanese attempt to cut Kohima off, 5th Brigade's advance was slow, having to fight every few miles. The Japanese 138th Regiment (-) surrounding 161 Brigade was reinforced with 1st Battalion, 58th Regiment brought up from Pulomi. 138th Regiment also had a reinforced company at Zubza. Having had no success in dislodging 161 Brigade the 138th Regiment (-) moved north in an attempt to cut the road further to the north.

Meanwhile 5th Brigade, moving along the ridges north of the road had forced its way through the lightly defended roadblocks, and on 15 April linked up with the commander of 161 Brigade at Zubza. By this time the entire 2d Division including tanks was assembled and moving in column toward Kohima. To the north the 138th Regiment joined its 3rd Battalion which had formed the 31st Division's Right Assault Unit. They attacked elements of the 2d Division at Khabvuma. This attack failed, so 138th Regiment turned south for its final attempt to permanently cut the Dimapur-Kohima road. They hit elements of 4th Brigade at Milestone 32 on 20 April, but were again repulsed at which time they began to pull back to Kohima.

Once 5th Brigade linked up with them, 161 Brigade left to resume its assault to Kohima. 5th Brigade and 4th Brigade took up the defense around Zubza and MS 32 respectively to keep the LOC open. 6th Brigade followed 161 to Kohima. On 18 April, 161 Brigade finally broke through to the garrison in Kohima, still defending their position atop Garrison Hill. During the night of 18-19 April, the wounded were evacuated and the garrison was resupplied. 161 Brigade was fighting to gain more ground at this time. The next night, early in the morning on 20 April, 6th Brigade, 2d Division moved in to relieve the rest of the garrison all of whom were pulled out of Kohima.

The garrison and 4th RWK from 161 Brigade had held the vital salient on Garrison Hill for eleven days. They suffered large casualties. All resupply had been by air. They had endured daily and nightly attacks. They were under near constant artillery and mortar attack. Wounded personnel were often wounded again in treatment centers.

Fortunately, Sato and his subordinate commanders showed no imagination. They confined themselves to repeated frontal attacks and never took advantage of excellent opportunities for infiltration and rear area operations. This was not typical. The Japanese had shown themselves to be expert at these tactics in earlier actions. This deficiency was very probably the primary reason the garrison was able to hold out. The 31st Division never corrected the problem.

On 19 April, Sato received orders from Mataguchi to send three infantry battalions and one artillery battalion to Imphal. This caused him

to turn to the defense completely, since his main mission was to hold Kohima and prevent the British from reinforcing Imphal from the north. On 20 April he reorganized his forces as follows: the 124th Regiment (less the third battalion) with 1st Battalion 138th Regiment and the 3rd Battalion of the 31st Artillery Regiment would assemble near the Aradura Ridge and prepare to move to Imphal; 138th Regiment (-) would defend on the right along Merema Ridge; in the center 3rd Battalion 124th Regiment would continue to defend Kohima proper; Miyazaki and the 58th Regiment would continue its attacks on Garrison Hill.¹²⁶

The next day (21 April) Sato had second thoughts. He gave Miyazaki the 1st Battalion 138th Regiment from the force preparing to go to Imphal because he believed he had to occupy Garrison Hill before he released forces to Imphal. He ordered an all out attack.

As this development was taking place, Grover, the commander of 2d Division was being pressed by Stopford to speed his securing Kohima before the monsoon set in. Grover had captured documents showing that 31st Division was to lose an infantry regiment and an artillery battalion to reinforce Imphal. He devised his plan accordingly. The 2d Division forces were still arriving and Grover also planned with this limitation in mind. He pulled 161 Brigade (-) out of Kohima to take up positions around Jotsoma as the reserve. 6th Brigade remained on Garrison Hill and would become the main effort. 4th Brigade and 5th Brigade would make right and left hooks to attempt to hit the enemy flanks from the south and north respectively. The 2d Division began the execution of this plan on 21 April.

On the night of 23 April, the all out attack of Garrison Hill was made. It lasted until the night of 29-30 April. Again the attacks consisted of a series of frontal assaults. The fighting was in very close quarters, including fierce hand to hand engagements. By the time the Japanese ceased this attack on the night of the 29th, the British had secured the deputy commissioner's bungalow which overlooked the cross-roads in Kohima. This position both denied access to the roads for the Japanese and provided a good base to support subsequent armor operations. The Japanese had lost over 4 companies of men.

At some point during his final attempt to take Garrison Hill, Sato determined that he could not accomplish his mission of holding Kohima if

he sent the designated reinforcements to Imphal. He therefore disregarded the 15th Army orders and sent no forces south.

As this action was taking place, the 4th and 5th Brigades were not making the progress expected due principally to the steep terrain made worse by the slippery conditions caused by rain. Grover therefore changed his plan and decided to concentrate the 2d Division for the attack, rather than make wide turning movements. This change would enhance a coordinated effort and allow all three brigades to enjoy the support of all division and corps artillery.

If one were to phase the Battle of Kohima, it is at this point on about 30 April that one could say the opposing forces switched roles. After failing once again to take Garrison Hill, Sato definitely shifted to purely defensive thinking and tried to save the north-south ridge running from First Hill in the north through Kohima and Kohima Ridge to Aradura Spur in the south. If he could hold Aradura Spur, he would still command the road to Imphal. The British switched definitively to the offense, originally planning to start the assault on Kohima on 30 April. Bad weather, however, held up deployment for the attack so it was postponed to 4 May. Map 9 shows a summary of operations in April. Map 10 shows the Japanese front line and British positions as they completed deployment on 3 May.

2d Division's plan was as follows. 6th Brigade (4 battalions plus tanks) in the center was the main effort and would attack to penetrate along FSD Ridge. 4th and 5th Brigades would strike the south and north flanks respectively, 4th Brigade objectives being GPT Ridge and Jail Hill and 5th's being Naga Village. 33rd Brigade of the 7th Indian Division, recently arrived in Jorhat, would be one of the Corps reserves in Dimapur. 161 Brigade was the other reserve still located at Jotsoma. 23rd Brigade (IRP) (Chindits) was continuing their advance from the north having fought several actions against 1st Battalion 124th Regiment, which had the mission of blocking the northern approach to Kohima. 23rd's mission to cut the LOC to the Chindwin remained unchanged. The Division and each brigade allocated some forces to hold secure bases. They did this on past indications of Japanese rear area attacks. The commanders had not yet appreciated that the 31st Division made no use of rear area infiltration as had

previously engaged Japanese units. Air and artillery fire support was to be switched from target area to target area on a time sequenced plan. Tanks were distributed to each element in an infantry support role.

The first full scale assault on Kohima by the British began on 4 May (Map 11). 4th Brigade took Naga Village but were driven out that night by a counterattack, leaving only some of their force in the western part of the village. In the center, 6th Brigade (+) had forced tanks and infantry south along FSD Ridge to deepen the salient, but they were unable to take Kuki Piquet Hill. Here, as was the case all along the lines of contact, forces were left intermixed in pockets that could not be extricated without losing ground gained. Stopford deployed one of his reserves (33rd Brigade) to 4th Brigade's sector in an attempt to take Jail Hill. They were not successful.

The attacks had succeeded in isolating Sato's three defensive units. To compensate he placed MG Miyazaki (his deputy) in charge of the left/south), while he concentrated on the center and right (North). His troops had suffered heavy casualties, had still received no supplies or reinforcements, and were running low on ammunition. But their excellently prepared positions and determination to fight to the last man had prevented significant British gains in spite of the heavy air and artillery fire they had to endure.

The initial assault lasted four days, but had only gained the positions previously outlined. After the initial assault the concentration was on holding what had been achieved and resupply for subsequent assaults. Stopford visited 2d Division in the afternoon on 4 May to discuss the plan. He laid down some priorities for Grover. They were in order: capture Jail Hill and Pimple Ridge by 6 May; clear Treasury Hill; contain and clear Pimple Ridge; mop-up generally in all areas captured.¹²⁷ Both commanders recognized that the battle would be a long and savage one. Jail Hill and Pimple Ridge were key to controlling the Imphal-Kohima Road. They were needed to force the link-up with Imphal.

Jail Hill would prove very difficult to take. Japanese positions on Jail Hill were commanding. They could take both FSD Ridge to the north and GPT Ridge to the south with automatic fire. A battalion of the 33rd Brigade (1st Queens) gained the hill on 7 May but because of machine gun

fire and mortars was unable to dig in and was forced to back off.

The British spent the next few days patrolling, resupplying and pounding Japanese positions with air and artillery. Between 4 and 7 May alone they fired over 11,000 rounds of artillery and employed daily attacks by Hurribombers and Vengeance dive-bombers.¹²⁸ It became evident that the only effective weapons against the well-built bunkers were direct hits by medium artillery (5.5") and near point blank 75 mm main gun tank fire. When tanks could not get to ground they needed, 100 mm anti-aircraft guns would be used for bunker busting but with less effect.

The attack on this key terrain was resumed on the night of 10-11 May. This time Stopford insisted that the attacking forces use smoke extensively to cut down the effectiveness of automatic fire from enemy bunkers. Conditions were perfect. The enemy did not appear to have used any system of fire control (ie. firing stakes) for firing during low visibility.

6th Brigade attacked FSD Ridge again and 4th Brigade attacked GPT Ridge. These attacks were designed to take the attention off 33rd Brigade's main attack on Jail Hill and DIS. The 6th and 4th Brigades' attacks were only partially successful. By-dawn the enemy still had forces on the reverse slope of GPT Ridge and in a strong point on FSD Ridge. The 33rd Brigade had been more successful. They had taken most of Jail Hill and all of DIS by dawn, but they were taking fire from the enemy still on FSD and GPT Ridges. Using smoke they were able to cover their digging in and consolidation efforts. On the 12th they cleared minefields and were joined by tanks.

When Sato realized he had lost the key terrain of Jail Hill and DIS, he ordered Miyazaki to withdraw to a secondary defense line to the north-east. At the same time he placed the 124th Regiment (-) under Miyazaki. The 124th (-) remained in place on Aradura Spur. He took one battalion (1st Battalion 58th Regiment) from Miyazaki and put it in the south of Kohina as part of his center defense unit along with 3rd Battalion 124th Regiment. The right defense unit (138th Regiment (-)) had still held Naga Village; no change was made. Sato had received reports of 23rd Brigade's advance on his LOC; he detailed 1st Battalion 138th Regiment to protect against that advance.

Having no reserve available, Sato was not able to mount any divisional counterattacks. Upon Sato's withdrawal order, 2d Division forces now occupied key terrain on the Imphal-Kohima Road on 13 May. They would still face a tough fight. 2d Division continued to pressure the enemy 13, 14, and 15 May, principally with aggressive night patrolling. 4th Brigade succeeded in taking Big Tree and Pimple Hill on 14 May. 5th Brigade, while unsuccessful in clearing Naga Village, hit Treasure Hill on the night of 13-14 May with a combat patrol. On the night of 14-15 May, 33rd Brigade assembled a Gurkha battalion (4/1) on Garrison Hill meeting almost no resistance, and that morning they linked up with 5th Brigade.

The British now had Kohima, but the Japanese were still in Naga Village and more importantly, were in good positions on Aradura Spur. Both these positions could dominate Kohima and the Imphal-Kohima Road as they were within close artillery range. Aradura Spur, however, had to be cleared before any link-up with Imphal could be effected.

The next few days were used for refitting, reorganization and rest. Patrolling and artillery fire on both sides was operative, but no ground changed hands. 6th Brigade and 161 Brigade, who had been in contact the longest, got three days "R & R" in Dimapur. During this period 268th Brigade (21st Indian Division) had arrived and was attached to 2d Division. The 7th Indian Division Headquarters (parent division of 33rd Brigade) commanded by Messewy, with one brigade (114th) also arrived. 161 Brigade was attached to 7th Division to make it a three brigade force.

On 19 May, 5th Brigade made a final attempt to take Naga Village. They had to go without tanks, because the engineers had not been able to prepare the roads adequately. Without tanks they could not eliminate the Japanese bunkers, and the attack failed after some initial success.

On 20 May, Stopford visited 2d Division and laid out a new plan. 5th Brigade was pulled out and sent to Dimapur three days R & R. 7th Division would attack on the left to secure Naga Village; 2d Division would attack on the right to secure and clear Aradura Spur.

7th Division attacked with 33rd Brigade hitting Naga Village, 161 Brigade focusing on First Hill to the north and 114 Brigade in reserve. By 25 May, 33rd had secured Naga Village and 161 had secured First Hill.

Both suffered a series of unsuccessful counterattacks which continued to the end of the month. 114th Brigade relieved 33rd in Naga Village so 33rd could assist 2d Division's attack.

On 26 May, 2d Division began its attack on Aradura Spur. 6th Brigade attacked on the right; 4th Brigade in the center; and in a surprise flanking movement, 33rd Brigade had moved south and attacked from the east from Pimple Ridge; 5th Brigade was in reserve. At the same time, the 23rd Brigade (LRP) had cut 31st Division's LOC 25 miles east of Kohima attacking and seizing a center of supply tracks at Kharasom.

Fighting along Aradura was intense but suddenly ceased in intensity on 31 May. The Aradura Spur was secure. The sudden cessation of fighting at the end of the month was generated by Sato. Having received no supplies from 15th Army and with all key positions threatened and his rear and LOC occupied by enemy, Sato decided to withdraw. Mataguchi attempted to countermand him, but disobeying the orders of 15th Army for a second time, Sato abandoned Kohima and began to retreat on 31 May.

Stopford would be left with the tasks of fighting individual pockets of enemy resistance and of pursuing the 31st Division to the Chindwin, but on 31 May the Battle for Kohima was won.

Stopford initiated the pursuit. Forces started south to effect the link-up with Imphal. They would face continued actions and some more tough fighting. On 22 June, tanks of the 2d Division met leading infantry from 5th Division. The Imphal-Kohima link-up was complete.

Air Operations

Imphal - Kohima

A quote from a Japanese soldier in the Burma Theater in the period of Imphal-Kohima sets the stage for the air story in that period.

Enemy aircraft are over in all weather continuously.

We can do nothing but look at them! 129

The British Army operations in the Burma Theater were critically dependent on the Royal Air Force and the United States ^{Army} Air Force. Air operations had succeeded in establishing Allied air superiority and once

established, used that advantage in resupplying and conducting the successful campaigns against the Japanese. This air strategy did not develop in a premeditated fashion, but rather evolved over time, owing primarily to the harsh terrain and climate of the theater. The initial strategy developed for the Burma action was solely one of land warfare.¹³⁰ This concept saw the thinking that land armies would move by surface means and take territory from the enemy, most supplies and reinforcements were planned by land lines of communication "the Stilwell Road", and air was thought of as an auxiliary arm of action. Early planners limited air to occasional emergency air supply, reconnaissance, air defense, and fire power in a conventional role.

The realities of Burma soon struck home, as one statement very well summarizes the nature of the area:

Just as land armies cannot walk or sail across the North Pole, Allied land armies could not walk across Burma - laboriously dragging behind them a ground line of communications - to arrive fresh, fully equipped and supplied, and able to fight and defend an.....fanatical, and determined foe. ¹³¹

Thus, the harsh realities of the theater saw a subtle trend, and one not even recognized by those closest to it, that of a true transition whereby the air service grew to be the primary arm and was supported by the land forces in exploiting advantages gained by the air.

This understood, one can transition to the critical role laid to the air forces in the battle of Imphal-Kohima. The long duration and intensity of the campaign could only have been carried on by the skillful use of air assets.

The air operation associated with Imphal-Kohima took three primary forms, counter-air, aerial supply and evacuation, and air strikes against Japanese troops and their lines of support. The Burma theater had been active long before the Japanese offensive across the Chindwin River in March of 1944. This was fortunate for Imphal as air superiority was becoming a fact by the time the critical siege was ongoing. This large scale destruction of the Japanese Air Force throughout Burma did not allow any viable concentration of air power on the Manipur fight. Thus

extensive air transport activities could be conducted on behalf of the Imphal garrison with little direct risk. This growing supremacy in the air had a significant impact on the campaign and several sources arrive at the same conclusion - it can hardly be overestimated in its importance to Imphal. During the first 6 weeks of the seige, AAF fighters destroyed 128 Japanese aircraft on fields within striking distance of the Imphal area, while British fighters in close defense damaged or destroyed over 100 other Japanese aircraft.

Several Japanese air efforts were mounted in early 1944 to drive out Allied efforts in Burma. On 27 March 1944, a raid was launched against the Assam air bases and Hump routes. 18 enemy bombers and 20 fighters were intercepted by P-40's and P-51's (USAF). The Japanese lost 11 bombers and 13 fighters while the U.S. lost just 2 aircraft.

The last serious challenge to the Allies came in May of 1944 when sweeps of 20 to 30 Oscars came into the Imphal area to try to assist Japanese ground forces into Kohima and to destroy Allied transport resupply to Imphal. The Japs were consistently intercepted and came out as losers. The Reports note a great drop in Japanese aircraft destroyed in May and June 1944. This coupled with ever increasing Allied air effort over Burma provides evidence of air supremacy achievement by late May 1944. (Chart 3 provides statistical data on aircraft)

The air transport story of the surrounded garrison at Imphal is the true lesson learned from this campaign. The Allied forces did not realize the true capability or abilities of the air forces, and yet a great feat was accomplished! This air capability equation was further complicated by the joint command structures. A Southeast Asia Command had been created for the joint British and American war effort in Asia. In 1943, integration of U.S. and British air units in India-Burma had been agreed upon. This saw a very complex problem - how to achieve unified operations control, maintain a coequal status, synchronize the divergent national interests of Great Britain and the U.S. in Asia, and maintain the separate technical, supply, and administrative channels of the RAF and the AAF. The structure ultimately created was truly complex. Five colors of ink in solid, broken, and dotted lines depicted the relationships. However, it worked as the details of the resupply of Imphal will show.

Air transport operations included routine supply of the bases; rations, POL, and ammunition; the fly-in of significant reinforcement - 1 division from Arakan to Imphal Plain in 758 sorties, 1 brigade from Punjab, and 1 brigade from Armada Road, and a heavy backhaul. This simple description of the air transport workload must be further expanded to capture its significance. It will be analyzed from 2 vantage points - the reinforcement of Imphal and the evacuations from Imphal. Tabular data will also be displayed on the details of the lifts. (See Chart #1)

Soon after the beginning of the Japanese offensive against Imphal, the need for reinforcements by air movement was recognized. This was complicated by the existing short-fall in theater airlift assets and other ongoing competing actions. The Troop Carrier Command (See more details Chart #2) ultimately had 230 aircraft at its disposal, after augmentation from the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. In mid-March, the veteran 5th Indian Division was withdrawn from the Arakan battle line and made available for movement. TCC plans estimated that 780 sorties would be required for troops and light equipment. The actual move was done by 20 C-46's diverted from Air Transport Command. The 5th Division was delivered to the central front. Two of the 3 brigades were landed on the Plain, with the 161 Brigade put down at Dimapur. The landing at Dimapur provided a defense for that key supply base and was one of the decisive moves in the campaign. The brigade was able to move from Dimapur to Kohima and arrived just in time to help save the garrison from a heavy assault by the 31st Japanese Division.¹³² This tied up the Japanese then in a siege, giving XXXIII Corps time to be brought up and to prepare for the relief at both Imphal and Kohima.

After the 5th Division had been put down on Imphal Plain and Dimapur, the move of the 7th Indian Division began. Rain and air-field problems complicated this move. One brigade, the 33rd, was to go on the Plain with the remainder to join XXXIII Corps at Dimapur. The requirement to move 4th Brigade came while the 33rd Brigade was moving. The strip at Dimapur had broken up under the heavy loads and poor weather so the men were flown to Jorhat. This hectic shuttle continued till mid April. Troops were dropped off at Jorhat, while at Jorhat others were picked up for use as replacements for Imphal and flown to the Plain. Additionally,

resupply missions were intertwined to pick up munitions for the RAF, off-loaded them, carrying back evacuees or casualties.

The last major troop unit air transported to battle was the 89th Brigade of 7th Division. This was completed on 12 May. In all transport aircraft carried 6 brigades of infantry, units of 3 divisions to reinforce IV and XXXIII Corps. This was the equivalent of 2 full divisions and was the largest movement of troops by air at that time.

As significant as the airlift fighting forces into the action, the evacuation was also monumental. Earlier experiences in the theater had seen the use of air as an evacuation method and its use at Imphal was not new. The situation at Imphal, though, was critical. As the fight began, 170,000 men at Imphal were isolated with about 30 days of supplies on the ground. The supplies were not balanced and resupply projections were not adequate to sustain the full complement. Early evacuation of sick and wounded were not substantial, as only 744 sick and wounded were flown out in April. The term "useless mouths" was applied to those not contributing directly to the defense of Imphal. About 25,000 of the service troops had been able to walk out before the routes had been cut by the Japanese, but another 25,000 had been flown out by transports. In April, about 550 had been flown out, but this greatly increased in May as 27,000 were flown out. This fly out cost little in extra or dedicated air support, but proved very positive to the garrison by reducing the weight of rations needed to feed the defenders.¹³³ 900 tons of supplies were projected to have been saved for June alone by this evacuation.

As the success of the aerial resupply, air movement of reinforcements, and the evacuation of wounded and non-essential personnel continued, the staffs reoriented to an air environment. Supply points, air fields, and operations were key elements and used to support the effort. Despite competition with other operations, air strip problems, a bad monsoon season, peaks and valleys, or workloss (often weather related), and local labor shortages, air supply had saved Imphal through operation STAMINA.

It prevented a Japanese victory that would have had a tremendous effect in India and China. At the conclusion of the action, some 118,000

troops were wholly maintained by air resupply and a good number of those had been flown into Imphal. Allied forces were still combat worthy, while the Japanese had lost perhaps 30,000 and their survivors were reduced to almost zero combat effectiveness. The lessons of air warfare and support at Imphal led to the new pursuit technique to drive the Japanese from Burma.

CHART 1

TABULAR DATA SUMMARIZING
AIR OPERATIONS
IN THE
IMPHAL - KOHIMA AREA ..

Supplies Delivered April - May - June 44	
	<u>Tons</u>
USAAF Transports.....	14,217
RAF Transports.....	18,098
Total Supplies Delivered	<u>32,315</u>

AIR EVACUATION CHARTS

Casualties

Evacuated by USAAF.....	10,210
Evacuated by RAF.....	<u>4,717</u>
Total	<u>14,927</u>

Non-essential Personnel Evacuated

Evacuated by USAAF.....	29,658
Evacuated by RAF.....	<u>29,101</u>
Total	<u>58,759</u>

Source

Air Operations in China, Burma, India, WWII

Mil Anal Div R-155281

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CHART 2

AIR ORGANIZATIONS FOR IMPHAL-KOHIMA

Troop Carrier Command (TCC)
(Integrated Army Air Forces - Royal Air Forces Hqs.)

Commanded by Brigadier General William D. Old

Original
Configuration

1st & 2d Troop Carrier Squadrons - (ASSAM)
- Spt of Stilwell
RAF 177th Transport Wing
(31,62,117,194 Transport Squadrons)

Modification

1st & 2d Squadrons joined by 27th & 315th Troop Carrier
Squadrons and 98th Airborne Squadron to form 443rd Jump
Carrier Group

Expansion
and
Meet Crisis

By March TCC had 4 American Troop Carriers and 4
British transport squadrons.

After March offensive, diversion of 5 troop carriers and one RAF transport.
Squadrons were borrowed from the Mediterranean Theater of Operations.

Source:

Air Supply in the Burma Campaign, p. 53.

CHART 3

BURMA OPERATIONS

JAPANESE AIRCRAFT LOSSES
DURING

MARCH - APRIL - MAY - 1944

	Destroyed			Probably Destroyed			Damaged		
	AAF	RAF	Total	AAF	RAF	Total	AAF	RAF	Total
March	100	17	117	13	5	18	28	19	47
April	96	11	107	7	7	14	35	25	60
May	75	10	85	15	9	24	55	31	86
	271	38	309	35	21	56	118	75	193

The Outcome

The British gained a clear tactical victory at Imphal-Kohima. The main reason for the British victory was a failure on the part of the Japanese high command to recognize Dimapur as the key objective. Dimapur was Slim's only base and railhead in Arakan, and, as such, was very definitely the British "center of gravity". Had General Kawabe (commanding the Burma Area Army) or General Mataguchi (commanding 15th Army) recognized this fact from the outset, they could have merely fixed Scoones' IV Corps at Imphal and concentrated their efforts in the north to seize the lightly defended garrison early on. This would have provided the Japanese a badly needed base, cut off Stilwell's supplies, further isolated Imphal and Kohima, and allowed the Japanese to attack the airfields in the Brahmaputra Valley, disrupting British air operations throughout the theater. Once Dimapur was secure, the Japanese could have turned their attention to defeating the isolated forces around Kohima and Imphal.

The Japanese never massed forces for a decisive attack. They chose instead to attack across a wide front which forced disadvantageous attacker to defender combat ratios. They had the opportunity to use fixing forces against isolated units and concentrate the bulk of their force directly against Imphal and Kohima or against specific British units. Instead, they tried to hit every area/unit with relatively equal forces. Once engaged the Japanese relied mainly on frontal attacks, making little use of their expertise at infiltration and rear area attacks. Along the same lines, the Japanese commanders tended to reinforce failure, making few changes in plans when the initial concept of operation had not worked.

The British enjoyed a clear advantage in logistical support. They used air and rail to keep their forces adequately supplied and to transport reinforcements into the battle. The Japanese suffered logistically having to cope with long LOCs over rough jungle terrain. For example, Sato's 31st Division never received resupply from the 15th Army.

The British had near total air superiority which permitted almost unhindered use of air power for logistical support and for close air

support attacks against Japanese positions. The weather cooperated and never seriously interrupted air operations.

The British also had a distinct advantage in combat equipment. They were able to bring all supporting artillery and a sizeable tank force into the fight. The Japanese did not have a good medium tank available to counter the British medium tanks. The trek from the Chindwin had forced the Japanese to leave some of their artillery behind. For example, the 31st Division took no 105 mm artillery pieces with them.

The Japanese enjoyed an advantage in having better trained and more seasoned troops, but this was negated by the poor tactics of their commanders as discussed above. After the initial stages of the battle, the British were able to build up a significant advantage in personnel strength.

The British were able to use indigenous forces as effective combat units (e.g. the 1st Assam Regiment). As in other campaigns, the Japanese still had not learned how to do this. They did not trust units of the Indian Nationalist Army under their command and planned to use them only as occupation troops.

The Japanese divisions never accomplished their missions. The 31st came close at Kohima but never really had control of the entire town. Plans were meticulously followed by both sides, with the exception of the Japanese 31st Division. Sato refused to follow orders on two occasions: first, when he did not send a regiment to Imphal; second, when he withdrew from Kohima on 31 May. His principal motive was concern for what was left of his force and his having felt that 15th Army had not properly supported him.

Japanese medical support was lacking due to the extended LOCs already discussed; evacuation was non-existent. The Japanese were reported to have killed their own wounded as hospitals were in danger of being overrun. Once again air support aided the British medically. They were able to evacuate wounded from units (less those surrounded and with no landing strips) and keep medical supplies coming.

There was little prisoner action for either side. The fanatical Japanese fought to the last man. Maps, plans, and diaries did fall into British hands and were used effectively. Those few Japanese taken prisoner

gave up information freely, having already suffered what they felt was the greatest disgrace - capture over death.

At the end of the battle of Imphal-Kohima, the Japanese had suffered the worst land defeat in their history. All told, they had lost some 30,000 men killed and another 25,000 sick or wounded. ¹³⁴ Much of their artillery, armor, and transport had been destroyed or captured. The 15th Army was decimated.

By 8 July, Slim's forces had pursued the remnants of the 15th Army to the Chindwin and Mataguchi's remaining forces withdrew across the river in retreat back to Burma.

SECTION 5:

Significance of the Action

Significance of the Action

The greatest battle of the China-Burma-India theater during World War II had operational but not strategic impact. As a result of the Imphal-Kohima battles in Assam and northern Burma, the relationship of the opposing allied and Japanese armies was irrevocably altered, yet the goal of defeating Japan was not materially advanced as will be discussed below.

The Imphal-Kohima battle was decisive in an operational sense. The Japanese Army in Burma suffered a mortal blow, losing the 15th, 18th, 33rd, 55th, and the INA Divisions. Although further offensive action was required by the British forces, the Japanese Army was unable to resume the initiative or to halt a concerted drive by the Allied forces.

The Allied cause obtained several immediate benefits from Imphal-Kohima. The victory secured air bases for supply of China and expedited the re-opening of the Burma road (January 1945). Likewise, the extensive logistic support area of northeast India and B-29 strategic bomber bases remained free to continue operations. Had the Japanese been able to penetrate past Imphal deeper into India, they may have been able to ignite the Indian liberation movement of Gandhi and Nehru which barely had been suppressed by diversion of 57 security battalions to internal security duties. Lastly, the western flank of Japan's Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere was unhinged by the defeat of the Japanese Burma Army whose primary mission was defense of the frontier.

On the other hand, the battle had no direct impact upon Allied strategic objectives. The victories in northern Burma did not accelerate China's contribution to the war effort. Hindsight shows that President Roosevelt greatly overestimated Chiang-Kai-Shek's determination to contribute to the defeat of the Japanese as long as Mao Tse-Tung's communist forces posed a more critical threat. Nor did the victory eject the Japanese forces from southeast Asia. As Nimitz and MacArthur pursued the Japanese in the Central and Southwestern Pacific areas, the British were unable to exploit their success in Burma due to lack of resources, particularly amphibious shipping, transport aircraft, and personnel replacements.

The victory of Imphal-Kohima and its subsequent pursuits eliminated the Japanese threat in Burma, preserved the resupply to China, and secured

northeast India. Unfortunately, the battle did not provide a significant advantage to the victors other than a morale boost to the British who had suffered major defeats by the Japanese forces in Burma.

The Imphal-Kohima campaign had no long term impact upon the Allied prosecution of the war. The United States incorrectly believed that tangible support for China would spur Chiang to attack the Japanese in China. The British realized that a MacArthur-style island hopping assault farther East would be more effective and advance their post-war effort to rebuild the Empire. However, the British were primarily oriented to the Mediterranean theater and realized that they must compromise with the United States over Burma to not jeopardize their main effort in the Mediterranean. Consequently, the British, U.S., and Chinese forces mounted an offensive in North Burma which prompted the Japanese to launch a preemptory spoiling attack. The result was the near destruction of the Japanese Burma Army in the vicinity of Imphal-Kohima.

In retrospect, the Allies failed to see the momentous changes beginning in Asia which would thwart their well-intentioned efforts. Churchill did not realize that the former British Empire in Asia was beyond restoration. Rising nationalism and the relative weakening of Britain prevented a return to the pre-war status. Further, growing anti-imperialist factions in Britain did not support the continued use of force to retain the Empire. Similarly, Roosevelt did not realize that Nationalist China was a "dead" ally only intent upon post-war consolidation.

The Burma area was of secondary importance to the defeat of Japan. As successful attacks continued in Central and Southwest Pacific areas, it was simply a matter of time before Japan was defeated. Operations in Burma did not advance this sequence to any appreciable degree. The Imphal-Kohima battle ranks in importance equivalent to the New Guinea battles where if the Allies had lost, the war effort would only have been delayed rather than halted. On a positive note, the Imphal-Kohima victory allowed the British to exit Southeast Asia with dignity.

The Imphal-Kohima battle has provided "lessons learned" for the military professional. One could argue that these lessons are not new but were relearned at a different place and derive from the principles of war.

Also, one must caution that some of these lessons may not be universally applied and relate only to situations similar in METT-T factors of analysis. Some of the more significant lessons follow.

The use of aircraft to resupply cut-off forces and to rapidly reposition forces was a major contribution to the Allied victory in Burma. Had the Japanese had an equal capability, the results of the campaign would certainly be different. During early engagements, the Japanese routinely fixed the British with a small frontal attack and then cut the British LOC by flank attacks. The poorly trained British forces then withdrew in disorder. Later in the war, aerial resupply contributed to major victories such as that in the "Admin Box" in the Akyab region. Likewise, the redeployment of the 5th India Division from the Akyab to Imphal contributed to Imphal's successful defense. However, this lesson may not be applicable today because of improved air defense weapons which are available to most modern forces.

Armor was effective in destroying well-prepared Japanese strong-points. The advantage of the tank in this mission compensated for the great difficulty in moving these vehicles through close jungle terrain. The observation here is that armor should not be totally ruled out in jungle terrain.

Training, discipline, and preventive techniques solved the greater part of the health problems caused by the jungle environment. Field Marshall Slim reduced the non-battle casualties by a factor of twenty through application of training, discipline, and prevention measures.

Proper use of special operating forces (SOF) such as Wingate's Chindits and Merrill's Marauders paid major dividends. SOF units provided human intelligence about Japanese dispositions which was available through no other source. Wingate's 1943 mission to interdict the Japanese LOC generated great confusion in the Japanese command echelon and gathered intelligence for the 1944 offensive. However, using SOF as substitutes for conventional forces and overextending the duration of their missions severely degraded their performance.

Training is a sine qua non for an Army. Initially, British and Indian Divisions in the CBI theater were poorly equipped and poorly trained. The

training they did receive was oriented to desert operations in the Middle East rather than jungle warfare. Consequently, these formations suffered consistent defeats when they first encountered the highly trained Japanese jungle fighters. This deficiency was later corrected and contributed directly to British success in late 1943 and beyond.

Jungle fighting required a strong logistics effort to sustain the fighting forces. Air, land, and water communications routes had to be employed. The Japanese Army was probably better trained and motivated than its Allied opponents, yet the failure to adequately support their forces caused Japan's defeat. The Japanese commander at Imphal-Kohima realized that he must capture the Allied supply stocks in order to continue his effort. He failed and lost the greater part of his army.

The Imphal-Kohima campaign provides countless examples of how a commander when faced with apparently insurmountable problems, can overcome those problems by proper mission analysis, leadership, and application of the principles of war. Field Marshal Slim epitomized the successful execution of this sequence of problem solving and should stand today as one of the greatest generals of the second World War. Had Slim served in a more visible theater, there is no doubt he would have achieved similar success there and have had his exploits recorded more pervasively in the records of the great war.

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⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 99-112.

⁶⁵Burma Operations Record, p. 50.

⁶⁶U.S. Military Observer Group, op. cit., p. 110.

⁶⁷Evans and Brett-James, p. 86.

⁶⁸U.S. Military Observer Group, loc. sit.

⁶⁹Evans and Brett-James, loc. sit.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 85.

⁷¹U.S. Military Observer Group, loc. sit.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Jiso Yamaguchi, Burma Operation Record of 15th Army Operations in the Inphal Area and Withdrawal to Northern Burma, (prepared 1952, revised 1957), p. 90.

⁷⁴U.S. Military Observer Group, op. cit., pp. 67-69.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 111.

⁷⁶loc. cit.

⁷⁷Evans and Brett-James, op. cit., pp. 67-69.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 74-75.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 83-84.

⁸⁰Ibid., pp. 75-82.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 72.

⁸²Slim, op. cit., pp. 248-251.

⁸³Speech extract by Brigadier R.H.M. Hill to the Royal Artillery Historical Society, Oct. 1969, p. 168.

⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 174-182.

⁸⁵Slim, op. cit., p. 261.

⁸⁶Extract from the Campaign of the Fourteenth Army 1943-1944; dtd 6 Jan 1945, p. 1.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Slim, op. cit., p. 260.

- ⁸⁹Ibid., p. 256.
- ⁹⁰Basil Collier, Japan at War, (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1975) p. 136.
- ⁹¹Callahan, op. cit., p. 137.
- ⁹²Charles Beteson, The War With Japan, (Michigan State University Press, 1968), p. 344.
- ⁹³Evans and Brett-James, op. cit., pp. 231-234.
- ⁹⁴Slim, op. cit., p. 245.
- ⁹⁵Ibid., p. 246.
- ⁹⁶Ibid., p. 249.
- ⁹⁷The U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey Military Analysis Division, Air Operations in China, Burma, India - World War II, March 1947, p. 28.
- ⁹⁸Campaign of the Fourteenth Army, op. cit., p. 1.
- ⁹⁹Joe G. Taylor, Air Supply in the Burma Campaign, USAR Historical Studies: No 75 (Maxwell: Alabama, Air University, 1957), p. 75.
- ¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 75.
- ¹⁰¹Military Observer Group, op. cit., p. 15.
- ¹⁰²Evans and Brett-James, op. cit., p. 117.
- ¹⁰³Ibid., p. 19.
- ¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 125.
- ¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 129.

- ¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 175.
- ¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 158.
- ¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 161.
- ¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 207.
- ¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 221.
- ¹¹¹Military Observer Group, op. cit., p. 115.
- ¹¹²Evans and Brett-James, op. cit., p. 245.
- ¹¹³Ibid., p. 269.
- ¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 291.
- ¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 206-207.
- ¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 316.
- ¹¹⁷Time-Life Books, China-Burma-India World War II, (Alexandria: Time Life, Inc., 1978), p. 147.
- ¹¹⁸Ibid.
- ¹¹⁹Yamaguchi, op. cit., p. 88.
- ¹²⁰Ibid., pp. 89-90.
- ¹²¹Ibid., pp. 71-72.
- ¹²²Slim, op. cit., pp. 261-262.
- ¹²³Ibid., pp. 267-268.
- ¹²⁴Time-Life Books, op. cit., p. 150.

¹²⁵Slim, op. cit., p. 268.

¹²⁶Yamaguchi, op. cit., p. 124.

¹²⁷XXXIII Corps Headquarters Report (1945-1946), Account of Operations
by 33 Indian Corps, April - June 1944, pp. 14-15.

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 16.

¹²⁹Evans and Brett James, op. cit., p. 193.

¹³⁰U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, op. cit., p. 26.

¹³¹Ibid., p. 26.

¹³²Taylor, op. cit., p. 77.

¹³³Ibid., p. 81.

¹³⁴Time-Life, op. cit., p. 153.

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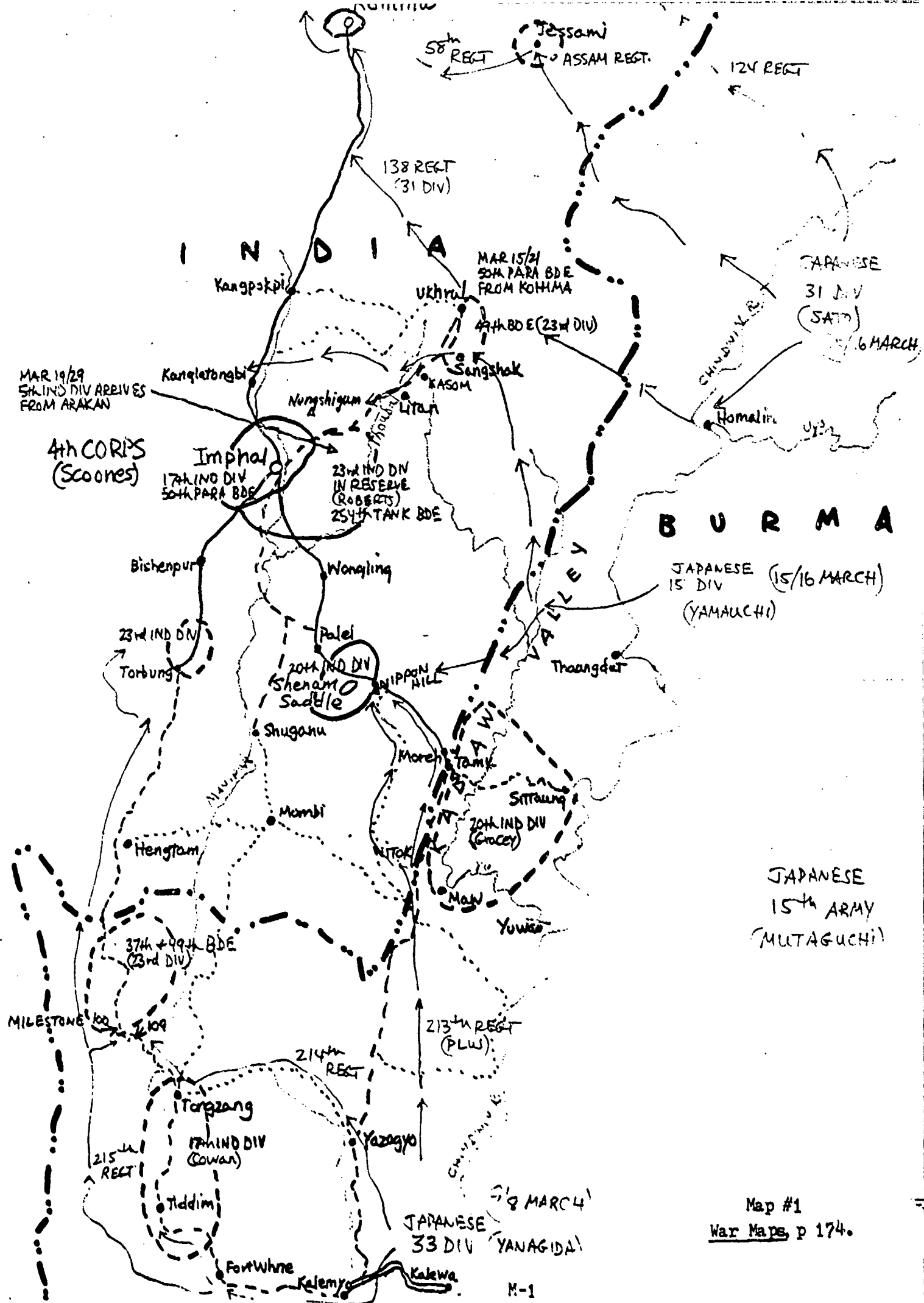
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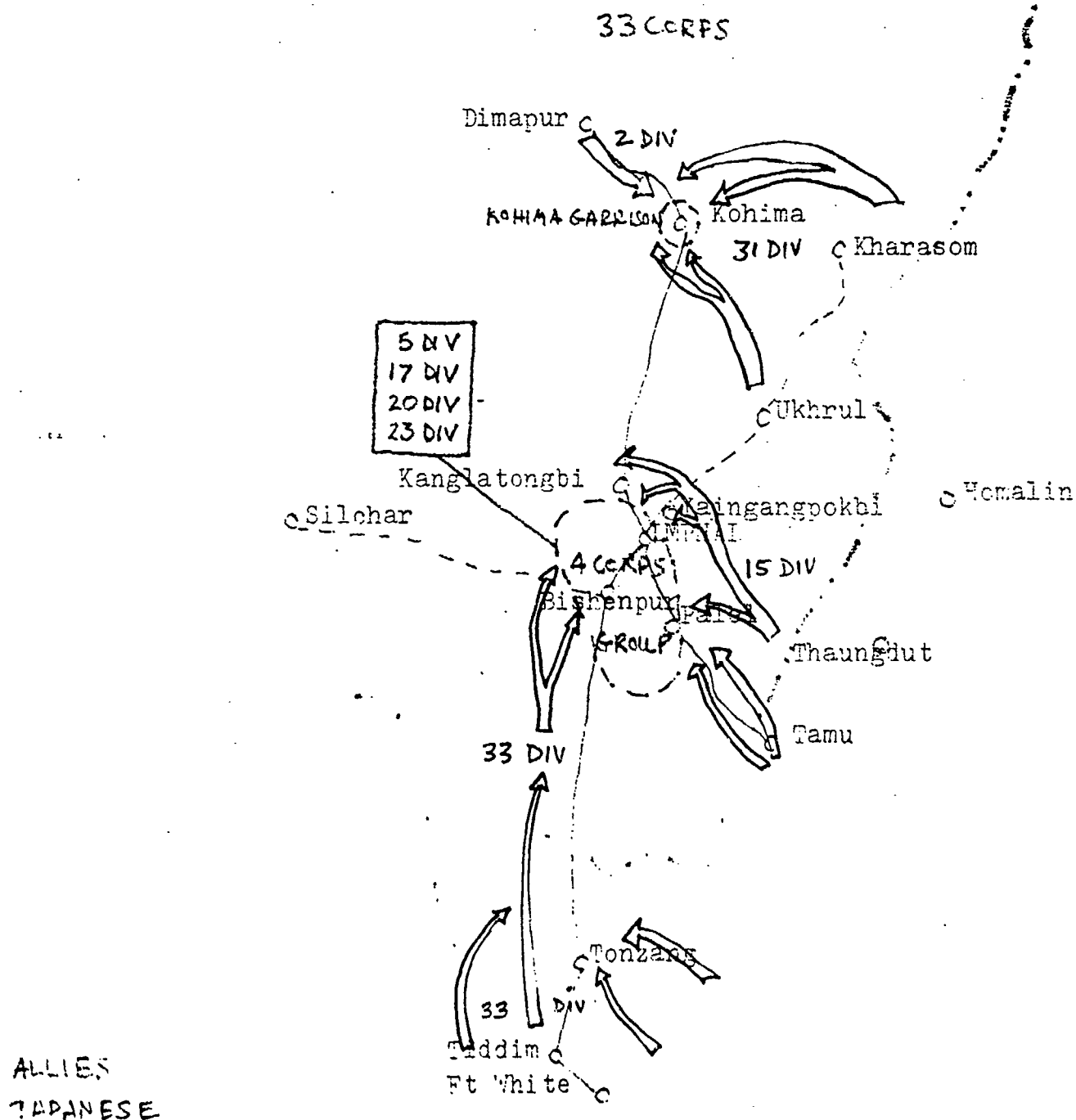
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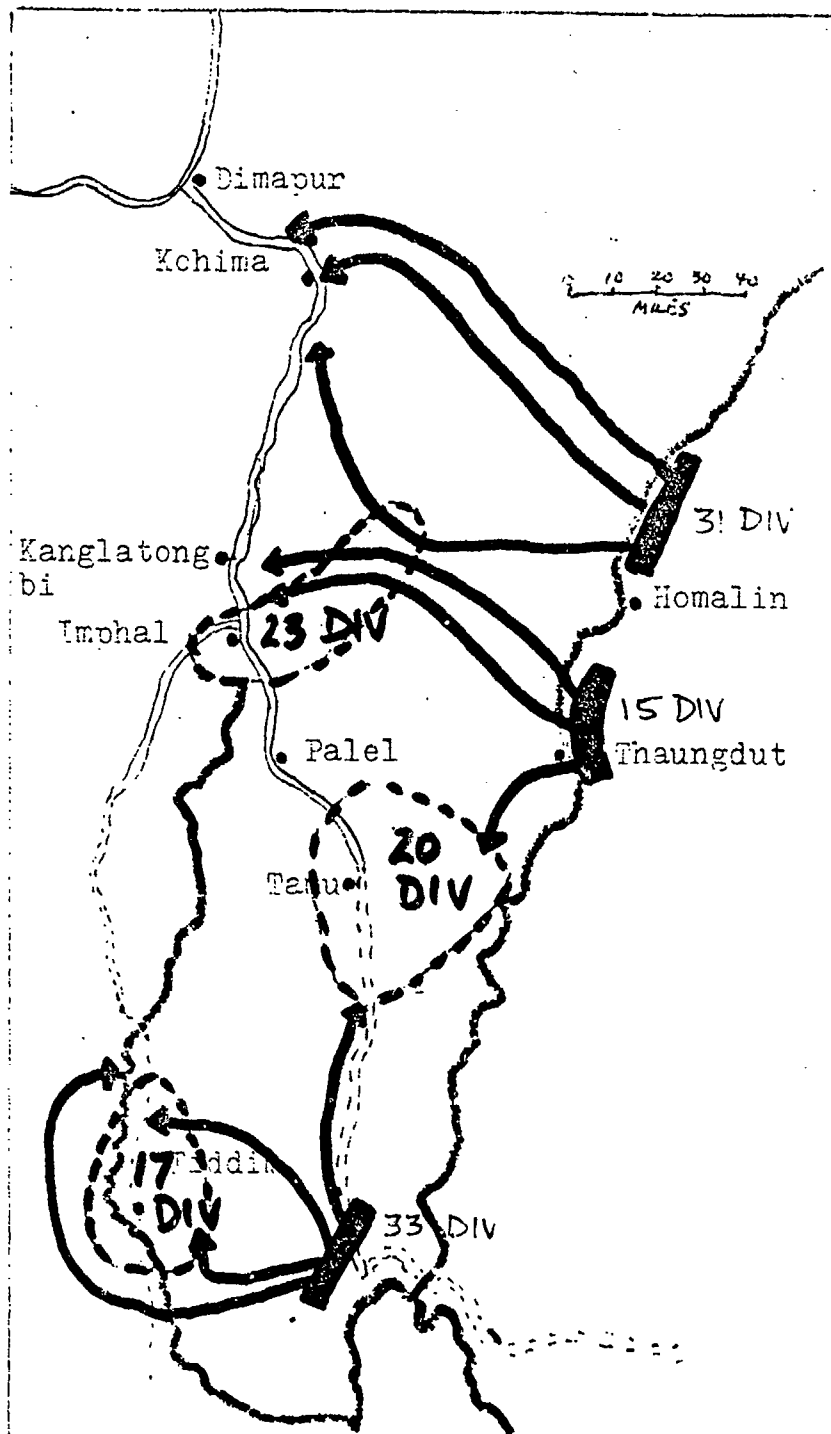
OPERATIONAL CONCEPTS OF 15 JAPANESE ARMY
VERSUS 14 BRITISH ARMY - APRIL 1944



Map #2

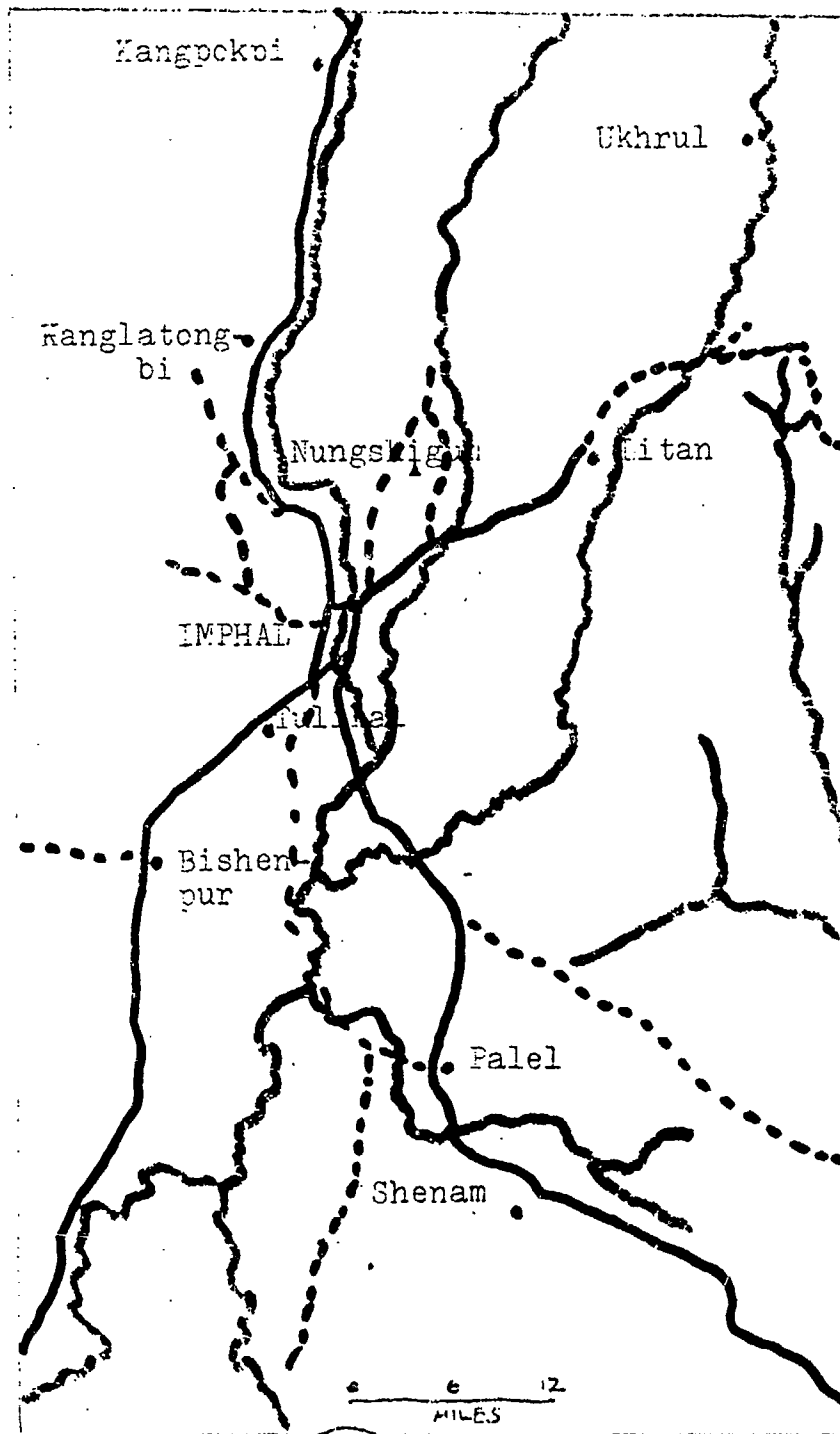
Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff...., p 148.

JAPANESE PLAN OF ATTACK AGAINST 4 CORPS

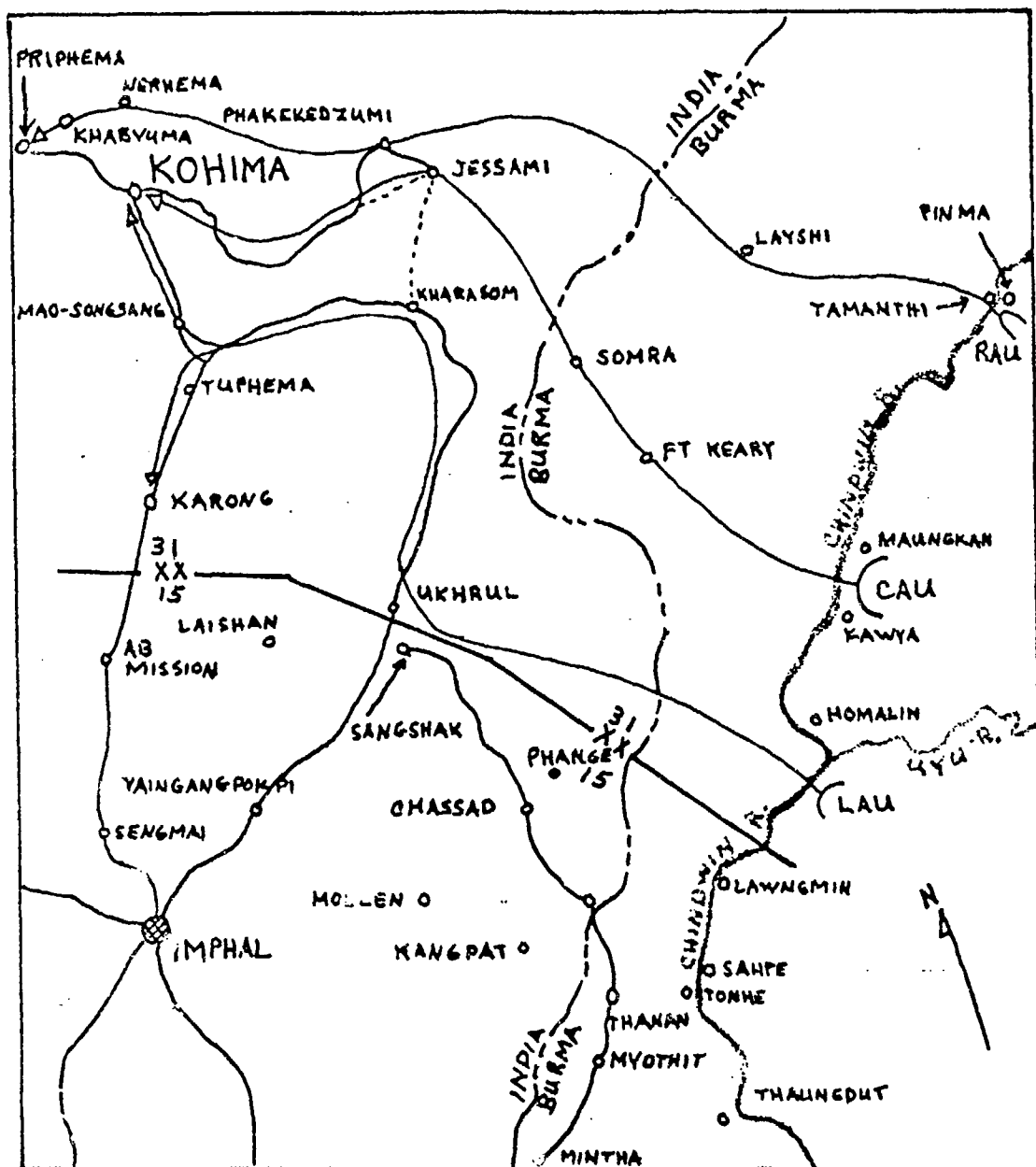


Map #3
Imphal, p 61.

IMPHAL AREA



Map #4
Imphal, p 6.



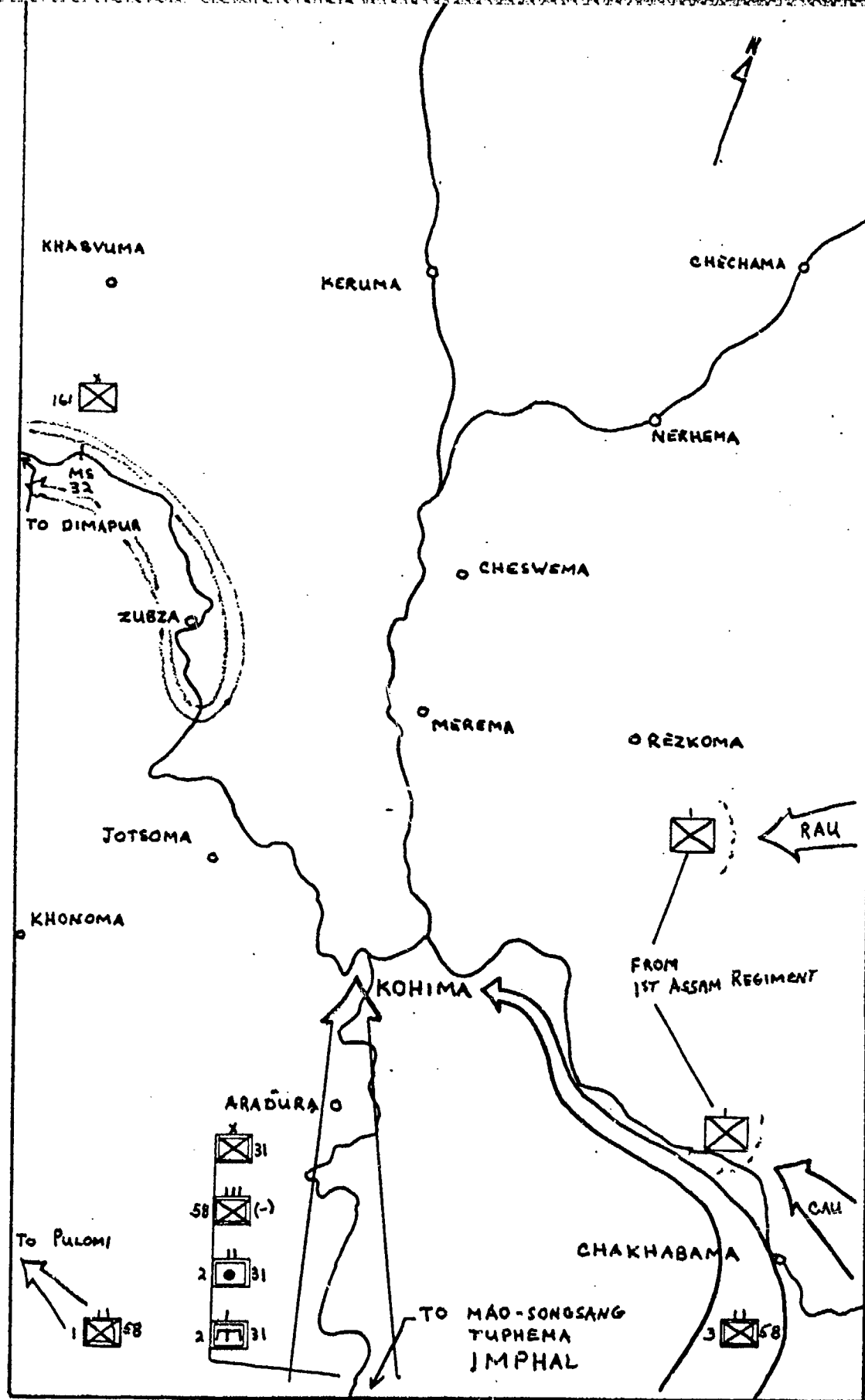
RIGHT ASLT UNIT	CENTER ASLT ADV GUARD	UNIT MAIN BODY	LEFT ASLT UNIT
3  138	 138 (-)	HQ  31	HQ  31
2  31	1  31 (-)	 124	 58
 31	1  31 (-)	 31 (-)	2  31
	 31	 31 (-)	2  31
		 31 (-)	 31
		 SUP 31 (-)	

(TROOP LIST ONLY; NOT ORDER OF MARCH)

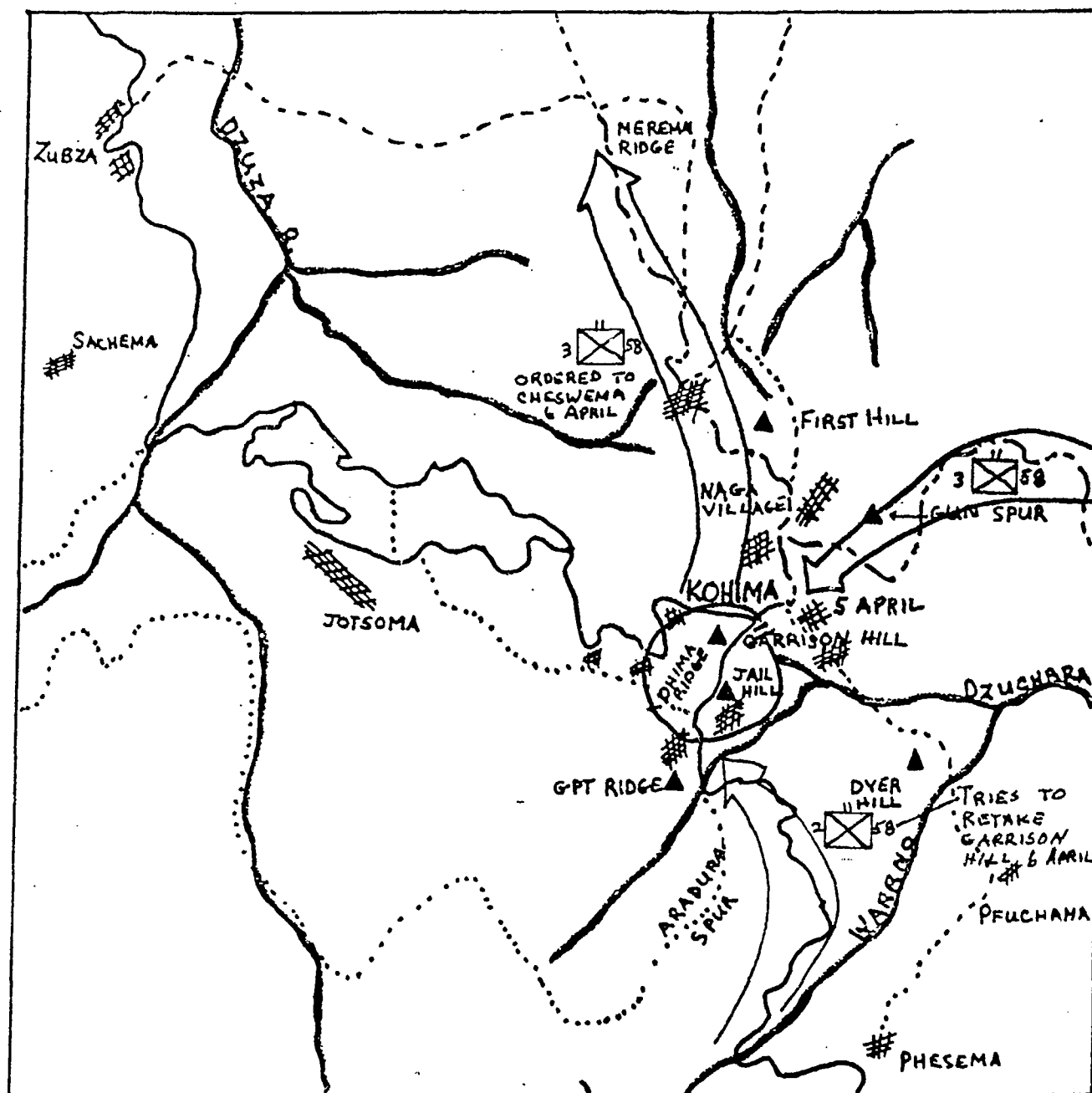
M-5

Map #5

Japan at War, p 81

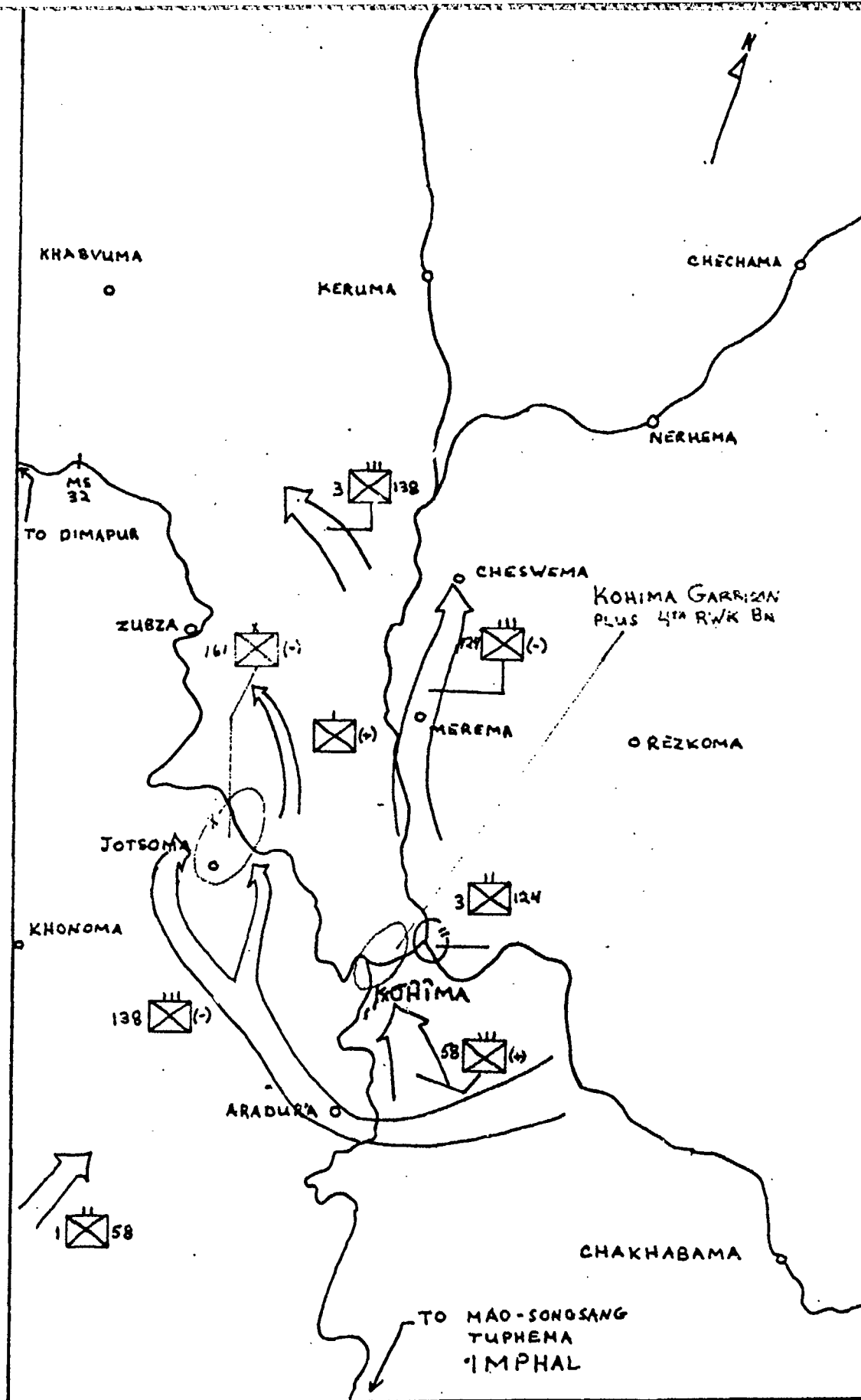


Map #6
Japan at War, p 120

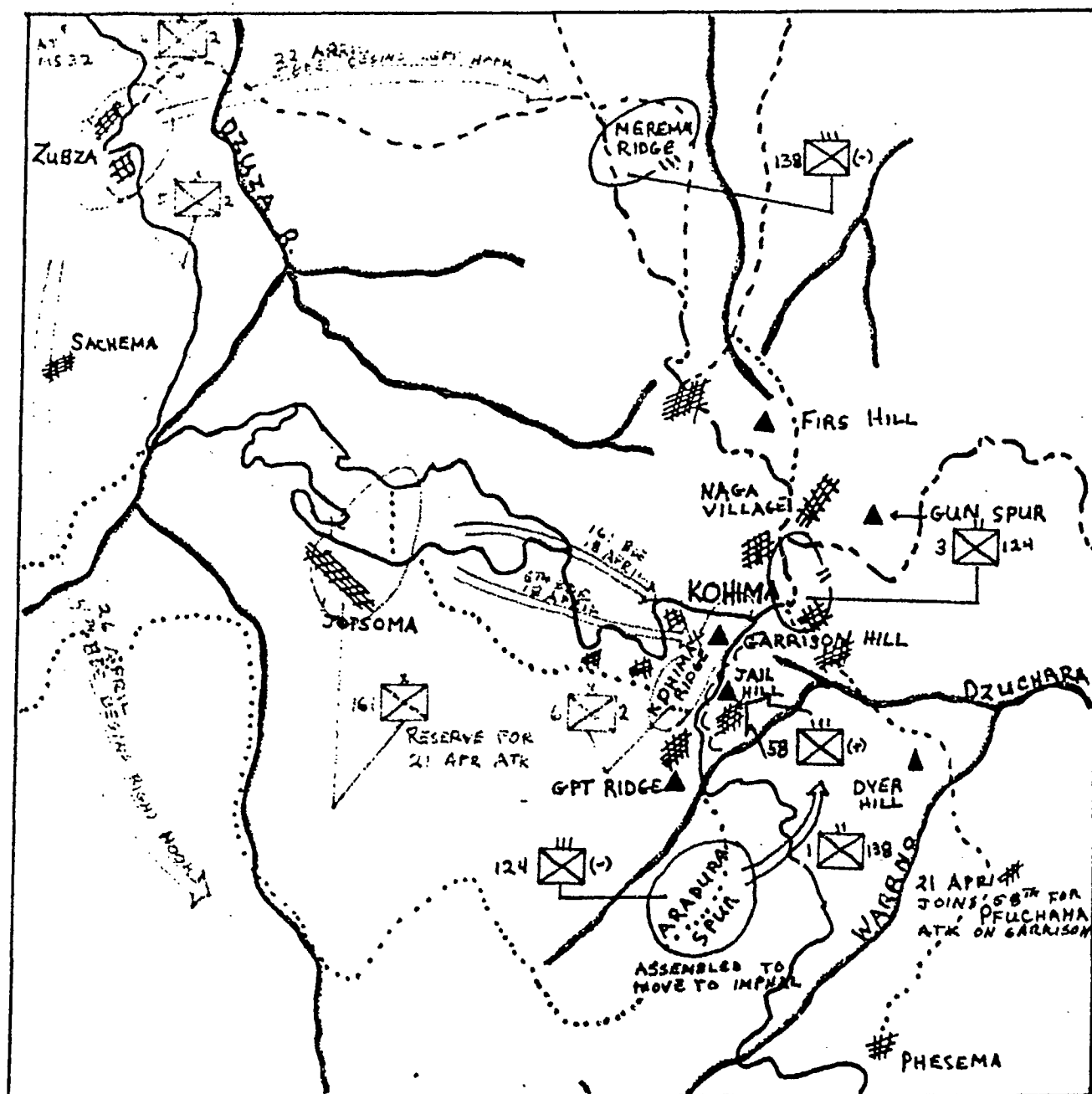


- ALL WEATHER ROADS
- - - FAIR WEATHER ROADS
- TRACKS
- ~~~~~ STREAMS / RIVER

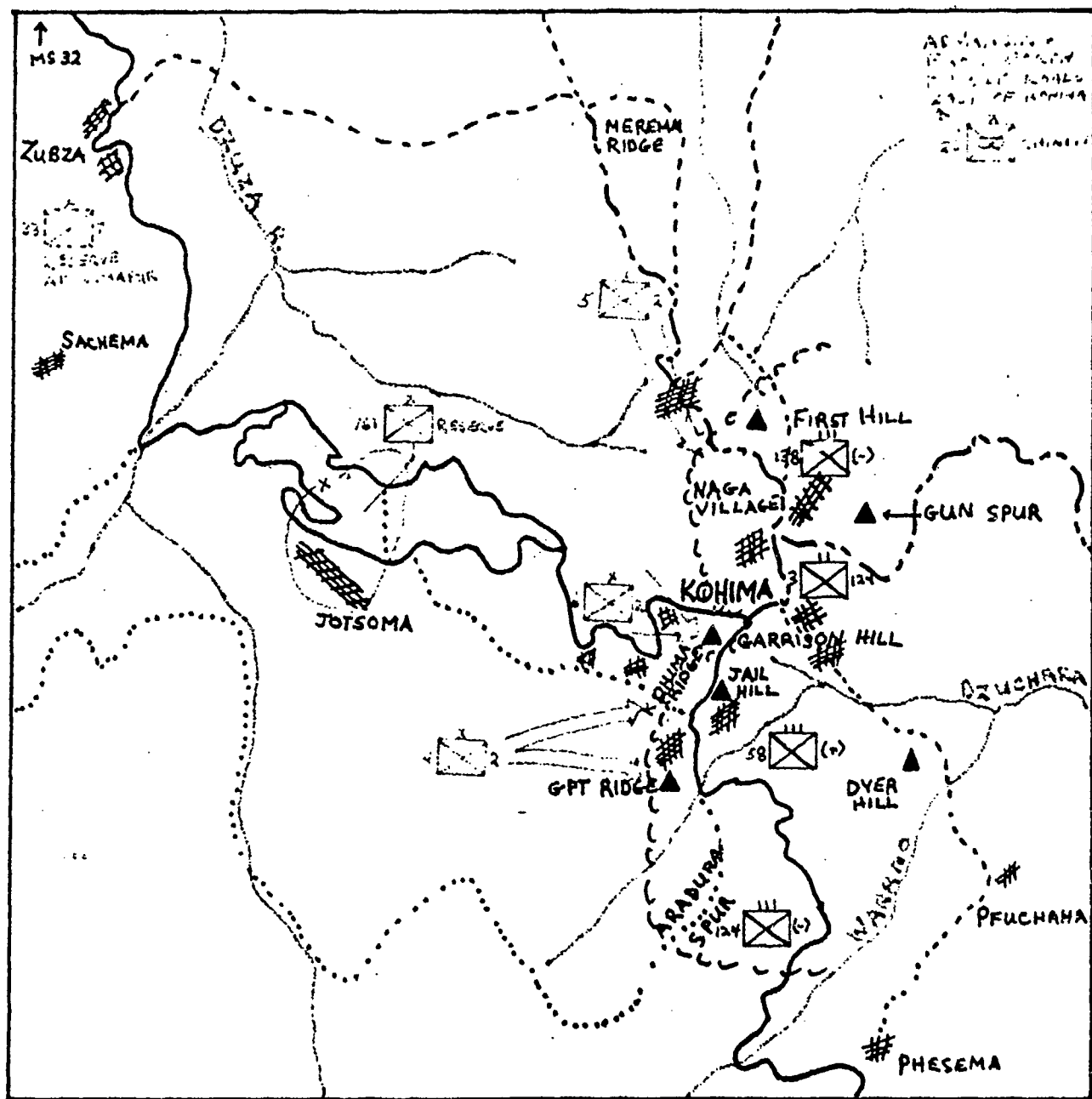
Map #7
 War Maps, p 176



Map #8
Japan at War, p 120

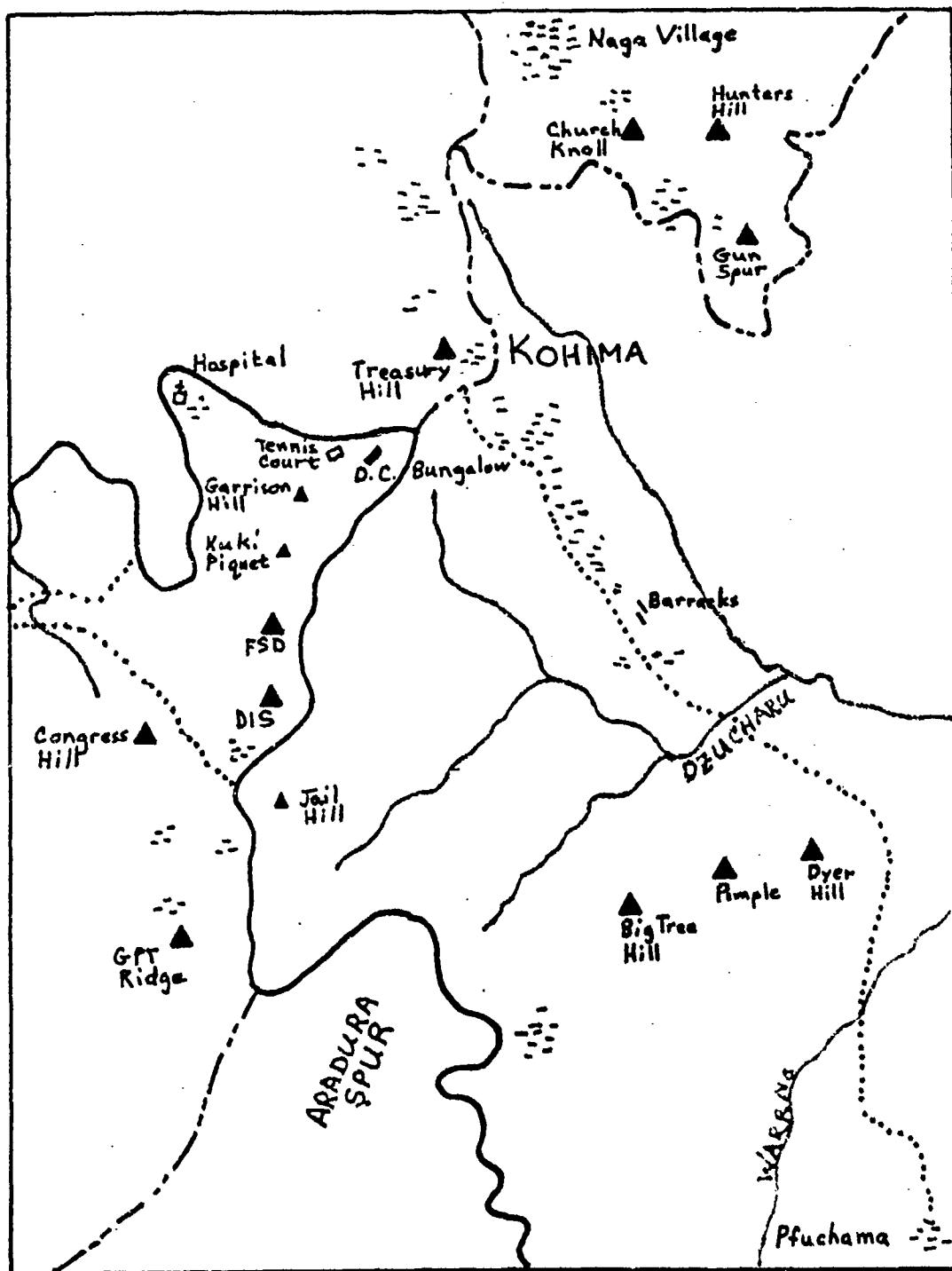


Map #9
War Maps, p 176



- ALL WEATHER ROADS .
- - - FAIR WEATHER ROADS
- TRACKS
- ~~~~~ STREAMS / RIVER

Map #10
War Maps, p 176



- All Weather Road
- - - Fair Weather Road
- TRACK
- Stream/River
- ⬢ Buildings/Huts