

Division. It was decided that the situation must be cleared up, as any further Japanese advance here would endanger not only Imphal itself but the neighbouring aerodromes upon which the air supply of 4 Corps entirely depended.

The Commander, 17 Indian Light Division decided, therefore, to engage the enemy closely south of Bishenpur, and simultaneously to make a flank movement with two battalions west of the Imphal—Tiddim road. These battalions cut the road behind the enemy positions which they then attacked from the rear. This attack, coming as it did simultaneously from the north and the south, took 33 Japanese Division by surprise and inflicted heavy casualties, though the nature of the country, lack of sufficient reserves and maintenance difficulties prevented decisive results.

75. While these actions were in progress 23 Indian Division had relieved 20 Indian Division on the Palel—Tamu road, south-east of Imphal, and had thrown back continuous enemy attacks. 20 Indian Division was transferred to the area east and north-east of Imphal, whence operating in two columns it continued the advance on Ukhrul. 5 Indian Division made slow progress northwards, astride the main road, and by the first week in June, had cleared the strong enemy position at Kanglatongbi, fifteen miles north of Imphal. During the succeeding fortnight, this Division advanced slowly in the face of strong opposition in difficult country and under most adverse weather conditions.

Operations by 33 Corps in the Kohima Sector.

76. Early in April, my main preoccupation had been the Japanese advance on Kohima which, if successful, would have threatened the Assam Railway, our main line communication with North-Eastern Assam, upon which General Stilwell's forces operating in North Burma and the air ferry route to China were both based.

77. When the scale of the Japanese offensive was disclosed and it was apparent that there was a threat to Kohima and that the road to Imphal was likely to be cut, it was clear that 4 Corps could no longer control operations in this area in addition to those to the south and north of Imphal. As a temporary measure, therefore, Kohima was placed under the Commander, 202 Line of Communication Area*, and an extemporised headquarters was set up at Kohima under Colonel Richards†, who had formerly commanded an infantry brigade in 81 (West African) Division. Headquarters 33 Corps was meanwhile flown to Jorhat from India and moved forward from there to Manipur Road, where it arrived on the 8th April.

The Siege of Kohima.

78. The strength of the Japanese advancing on Kohima was originally estimated at three battalions, with possibly one more in reserve, and the orders given to Colonel Richards were to hold Kohima and to deny the area Jessami—Kharasom—Kohima to the enemy. It was thought unlikely that the Japanese could move a force greater than this through the Naga

Hills, whose tracks were narrow, steep and scarce.

On the 29th March, however, it had become evident that 31 Japanese Division was moving against the Kohima area.

79. Jessami and Kharasom cover the tracks leading to Kohima and Tuphema, the latter is on the main road some fifteen miles due south of Kohima. The enemy attacked Kharasom on the 27th March and Jessami the next day. The garrisons of these two posts, found by 1 Assam Regiment, put up a most spirited defence for several days and then made a gallant fighting withdrawal, which gained valuable time for the preparation of the defences of Kohima.

80. 161 Brigade of 5 Indian Division had concentrated at Manipur Road on the 30th March, and was sent to reinforce the Kohima garrison, but it was withdrawn to meet a reported enemy threat further north which menaced the Dimapur base. As the enemy closed in on Kohima, however, the Commander, 202 Line of Communication Area, sent back the 4th Battalion, The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment of that brigade to assist in its defence, and it arrived on the day on which the Japanese opened their attack. When it became apparent that the threat to Manipur Road from the east was not serious, and that, moreover, the enemy were making no attempt to cut the railway, although it would have been easy for them to do so by sending forward small demolition parties by forest tracks, the remainder of 161 Brigade less one battalion already in Kohima was again ordered forward towards Kohima. It advanced into the hills to within four miles of Kohima on the west, but, being itself engaged, was unable to reach the garrison, although two companies actually succeeded in fighting their way in on the 18th and proved a welcome reinforcement in the bitter fighting which occurred on that date.

81. The Japanese launched their attack on Kohima itself on the night 4th-5th April, using two regiments (the equivalent of two of our brigade groups) and pressed it incessantly for fourteen days. It was gallantly held by the garrison consisting of the 4th Battalion, The Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, the Assam Regiment, the Shere Regiment of the Maharaja of Nepal's Troops and a number of administrative units and men collected from the convalescent camp.

82. Ammunition and food were adequate, but the water ration had to be reduced to half-a-pint a man for some days as the enemy got astride the water pipeline on the 5th April and it was not till the 13th that a new source of water was fortunately discovered.

83. On the 11th, the Air Force was asked to drop water and mortar ammunition. Boxes of three-inch mortar bombs were dropped, some of which were delivered in error to the enemy. When the Japanese used them against the garrison it was reported that they had started using a new and most effective type of bomb.

84. On the 15th, and again on the 18th, the enemy made determined assaults, but were ejected from the footings they gained; the air support given to the defenders on these

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